

# SAFETY ALERT

## Near Miss: Walk-in Freezer

**Ref Number:** 10080

**Alert Date:** November 2019

**Incident:** Two technical staff were working inside a -20 °C walk-in freezer.

To preserve the temperature within the freezer they closed the door behind them. They had presumed they could easily open the door from the inside.

When attempting to exit the freezer, the freezer door would not open.

The technician's cell phone had signal so they were able to call for help.

Neither of the technicians suffered any physical harm though both said it was a scary situation.

If you own or use walk-in freezers, please review how the safety features and local rules of use work. If changes are needed or planned, please communicate them to us and we will collate and share responses received.

**Please discuss this safety alert with your teams, where walk in freezers and coolers are used.**

**Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

[hsw@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:hsw@auckland.ac.nz) [www.auckland.ac.nz/hsw](http://www.auckland.ac.nz/hsw)

### Controls while working in and using a walk-in freezer

- Automated occupancy **alarm** timer when the door is open
- Emergency alarm connected to the **security** team
- **Notify** supervisor /colleagues you are entering the freezer
- Place an **appropriate sign** on the outside door advising work is being carried out inside the freezer
- **Check the door latch** is functioning and able to be opened from the inside
- To preserve temperature within the freezer, **DO NOT CLOSE THE DOOR**, rather allow the door to rest on the door frame without closing
- Wear **appropriate PPE**
- Take **regular breaks** of no less than 20 minutes duration
- Remember: extreme cold can **impair physical ability** and mental judgement
- **Inform your supervisor** / lab manager when you have completed your work
- Ensure **regular maintenance** and checks are carried out on the freezer safety controls