

I stand in a dangerous room encased in gear not meant to protect me. The air, scrubbed dozens of times over, contains less than one thousand particulates per cubic foot of air—it is called a “clean room” for a reason, after all.

The white bouffant cap covering my head provides no protection from falling objects. The exterior of the cap has a texture not unlike thin wax paper folded many times over, and indeed I suspect that it is hydrophobic to prevent liquids from penetrating the cap. The interior is similarly rough, though it feels more like wafer-thin burlap and is constructed from a plastic-derived cloth. As a result, the cap suffers from what I affectionately refer to as “fuzzlies”, loose thread or cloth that has unraveled and clumped together to form small tufts not unlike the balls of lint that accumulate in the filters of clothes dryers. Made of a material only slightly more durable than butcher paper, the comical-looking hat’s purpose is to protect the clean room from hair and, particularly for the bald, shedding skin cells. To keep the cap from slipping from one’s head, a flimsy but stretchy elastic ring lines the rim where one typically inserts one’s head; I say “typically” not because one’s head can be put in another type of headgear, but because a man with a well-groomed shoulder-length black beard can on occasion be spotted wearing one about the lower half of his face.

Over my arms, legs, feet, and torso, a suit of the same papery material as the cap provides little defense against the myriad toxic and caustic chemicals I regularly interact with. Like the bouffant cap, its purpose is to protect the carefully controlled environment from the veritable maelstrom of dust, hair (human and feline), and small particulates coming off of my clothing and body. Everyone is required to wear the suits, though thankfully the lab provides them in different sizes so 105-pound Asian women are not engulfed in suits meant to fit 160-pound men. At my wrists and ankles, elastic rings like that on the rim of the cap are largely successful at

preventing the suit from moving too much and exposing any skin, though they do nothing against the suit's fuzzlies. As such, I must be careful and ensure that none find their way into chemical baths or sensitive equipment; in the case of the former, I waste time cleaning and replacing the 16 liter bath, and in the event of the latter, explosions, toxic gas leaks, and expensive repairs are three of many possible and unpleasant outcomes. Running up the front of the bunny suit is a small metal zipper that begins at the junction of my legs and ends at the collar of the suit. The zipper, like the rest of the disposable outfit, is cheap, and the number of times it catches while zipping up is a fairly good indicator of the number of fuzzlies present in the rest of the suit. To the left of the zipper where a breast pocket might normally be, a sticker twice as long as it is wide with my name, position, and supervisor's name serves as a means of quick identification in a facility where everyone is dressed identically.

Over my hands, bluish purple—128-0-255 red-green-blue, to be precise—nitrile gloves keep the oil and grime from my otherwise uncovered hands off the buttons, handles, and keys I touch. While they stretch easily enough, they still lightly restrict my hands' movement, and so I take care to account for the decrease in dexterity when fine motor skills are required. The interior is lightly dusted with white powder like that on the palms of a gymnast to prevent slippage, and it carries a distinct scent like that of the interior of latex gloves.

I choose to forego the face mask today; I seldom go near the very humidity-sensitive equipment. With everything pulled up, zipped up, and covered up save for my face, my workday begins.