

NMR NOTES #22

Managing NMR Passwords

Every user authorized to use one or more of the NMR spectrometers has his own user login name and password. This information is stored in an LDAP database residing on the NMR fileserver, along with all of the home directory information. This means that the same password file is used for all of the systems, once you change your password, it is changed on all of the systems. This password information is also moved to a separate, simpler database used by the NMR reservation system every morning at 3 AM. When you change your password, that change is effective immediately on all of the NMR spectrometers and workstations, but the old password will persist in the reservation system until the next morning – then the new password will be effective for reservations.

When a new user account is created, a temporary password is assigned. This temporary password is set to expire 30 days after the account is created. The system starts generating warning messages 15 days before a password expires – if you ignore these warning messages and a password is allowed to expire, it will have to be reset. You cannot fix it yourself. Once a temporary password has been changed, it should not expire – there is currently no password aging enabled on these systems. However, if it appears that a password has been compromised, it may be flagged for change, typically within 4 or 5 days. It is your responsibility to keep your password secure and not share it in order to avoid this sort of situation.

While you are never required to change your password, after changing the initial temporary password, you may change it as often as you wish. Whatever password is in the LDAP database at 3 AM will be copied over to the reservation system.

There are two different, and completely equivalent, ways that you can change your password. First and easiest, on the graphic desktop, you can go to the top menu bar and click on **System** → **Preferences** → **About Me** to open a personal information window. All of the information there will be blank, and none of it needed for anything. There is a **Change Password** box in the top right corner that will put you into a graphical interface that will lead you through changing your password. It will require your old password to verify your permission to change the password, it will test your new password against some minimum criteria for a secure password, and then request verification of that new password. This ensures that you did not make a typo in entering the password.

Alternatively, you can simply open a Linux terminal window and execute the **'passwd'** command. This will go through the same steps as the graphical interface, but on a command line instead of an interactive window.

It doesn't make any difference which mechanism you use, the underlying program is the same. What is important is that you choose a good, secure password and keep it secure.