



Environmental and Fire Safety Reading

Introduction

No matter where you work in the healthcare field, you come across unique and possibly fatal hazards everyday. This handbook will show you how to protect yourself from some of the most common hazards.

Slips, Trips & Falls

You can reduce your risk of injury from slips, trips and falls if you are aware of your surroundings. Sources of slip, trip and fall hazards include:

- Wet floors
- Un-tacked carpets
- Cords
- Poor lighting or too much lighting

If you observe a hazard, correct it or report it to your supervisor. In addition:

- Don't rush down corridors. Take shorter, slower steps. Maintain your center of balance under you.
- Wear sensible shoes with good traction and support.

Back Safety

Some healthcare workers have as much strain on their backs as construction workers. To avoid back injury, stay physically fit and maintain good posture.

When lifting patient or heavy items:

- Bend your hips and knees – not your waist
- Lift with your leg muscles – not your back or arm muscles
- Avoid twisting
- Never lift a load higher than your waist
- Keep the load close to your body
- If you need help lifting or moving a load, ask for it.

Electrical Safety

To manage electricity safely:

- Report all shocks immediately – even tingles
- Never work around electricity when you or your surroundings are wet. Remove metal jewelry, watches and belt buckles.
- Don't use so-called "octopus" adapters. Plugging too many cords into one outlet can overload the circuit.
- Check GFCI outlets regularly. Push the test button. The reset button should pop out. Press to the reset button to reactivate.
- Examine all cords and plugs routinely. Replace any that are damaged or that heat up when used.
- Keep cords away from heat and water. Don't run cords under rugs or through doorways.
- Never attach cords to the floor, wall or other objects with tacks or pins.
- Use grounded, three-hole outlets or adapt ungrounded outlets with a standard plug adapter. Never break off or bend the third prong on a grounded plug.
- Don't use damaged outlets or adapters that let you plug extra cords into an outlet.
- Don't use any electrical device that blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker, shocks or appears damaged.
- Follow safety instructions when using electrical equipment.

Fire Safety

Prepare yourself before fire strikes in your workplace:

- Memorize all exit and emergency routes.
- Identify all fire alarms.
- Learn how to operate fire extinguishers.
- The first 2-3 minutes are most critical. It is a RACE for safety.

Remember, smoke and heat are just as deadly as flames:

- Don't touch or open any door without first testing the amount of heat radiating from it.
- Stay low to the floor to avoid inhaling too much smoke.

Disinfections and Sterilization

Develop a mental eye for spotting potential hazards that cannot be seen, heard, felt or smelled:

- Recognize what needs to be disinfected and sterilized and learn appropriate methods for each.
- Generally, semi-critical equipment can be disinfected. Critical equipment requires the more effective sterilization.

Handling Medical Waste

Blood and other body fluids can carry the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the hepatitis B virus (HBV), drug-resistant organisms (DRO's) and radioactive waste. Therefore, it is important that all medical waste related to patient care be treated as potentially hazardous.

Examples of medical waste include:

- Sharps
- Blood
- Body Fluids
- Specimens
- Soiled laundry
- Dirty dressings

Bloodborne Pathogens

Your employer has developed an Exposure Control Plan to help implement the requirements of OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. Make sure you are familiar with both documents. Treat all medical waste and blood as contaminated and act accordingly.

- Needle sticks are one of the most common ways diseases are transmitted on the job. Do not bend, recap, shear, or break used needles and other sharps.
- Immediately after using sharps, place in an appropriate, puncture-resistant, leak proof, color-coded container
- Minimize splashing, spraying, and spattering when performing procedures involving blood or other potentially infectious materials.
- Separate and label all medical waste at the source. Use separate containers for each type of waste.
- Red or red-orange labels, bags or containers with the biohazard symbol warn you that contents are biohazardous materials.
- Don't eat, drink, smoke, apply cosmetics or handle contact lenses where there is a reasonable likelihood of occupational exposure.
- Don't keep food or drink in refrigerator, freezer, cabinets or on shelves, countertops or benches where blood or other potentially infectious materials are present.

Good Housekeeping

Your facility's Exposure Control Plan lists specific methods and schedules for cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated. Some general rules:

- Protective coverings on equipment and surfaces must be replaced if contaminated or at the end of the work shift.
- Use a broom and dustpan or tongs to pick up broken glass – not your hands.

- Handle contaminated laundry as little as possible and with minimal agitation.
- Use leak proof bags to transfer contaminated laundry.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a vital barrier between your body and danger. PPE may include:

- Gloves
- Gown
- Apron
- Goggles
- Face Shield
- Mouthpiece
- Resuscitation bags or other ventilation devices

Disposable single-use gloves are the most common type of PPE. Heavy-duty utility gloves are used for housekeeping duties and direct contact with medical waste.

- Cover cuts and abrasions with bandages before being gloved.
- Replace PPE as soon as practical if contaminated or immediately if torn or punctured and no longer offering barrier protection.

Hazard Communication

In addition to medical waste, there are other hazardous substances on the job such as cleaning solvents, anesthetics and radioactive materials.

Your written HazCom Program provides a range of information and training. Become familiar with it and know where it is located. In particular, it will tell you:

- Which hazards are in your work area
- How to identify and read Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs)
- What you should do if a label is missing or torn
- What happens when substances are mixed
- How to dispose of hazardous substances
- What first aid to give in an emergency

Radiation Safety

There are two primary ways you can encounter radiation in a healthcare environment:

- External beam sources, like x-rays or gamma rays.
- Radioactive sources used internally for patient diagnosis or treatment.

Follow these guidelines to avoid harmful effects of exposure:

- Minimize your time exposed to radiation source.
- Maximize distance between yourself and radiation source.
- Use shielding and protective clothing when appropriate.
- Never touch anything with a radioactive warning label unless you are trained and authorized to do so.
- When caring for patients being treated with radioactive materials, dispose of syringes, radioactive liquid and other waste properly.
- You may enter the room of a patient being treated with radiation to perform normal duties, but you should limit the time spent in the room.

Hand washing & Glove Removal

Hand washing keeps you from transferring hazardous materials from your hands to other areas of your body, patients, or the environment.

- When dealing with any potentially hazardous material, always thoroughly wash your hands before and after handling it.
- No barrier is 100 percent effective. After each activity, remove gloves and wash hands before putting on a new pair.
- When removing gloves, pull one glove off from the outside top and hold in gloved hand. With exposed hand, peel second glove down from top tucking first glove inside second. Don't touch outside of glove. Dispose of entire bundle promptly in the proper waste receptacle.
- Wash all surfaces of the hands with soap, friction and running water for a minimum of 15 seconds.
- If infectious material gets on your hands, the sooner you wash it off, the less your chance of becoming infected.
- If hands or any areas come in contact with blood or other potentially infectious material, wash with non-abrasive soap and running water immediately.
- If mucous membranes are exposed to contamination, flush with water for about 15 minutes, then seek medical attention.
- If there is no sink in your work area, appropriate antiseptic hand cleanser or novelettes will be provided. But you must still wash with soap and running water as soon as possible.
- Wash hands between patients so as not to transfer contaminants.