

Preventing Needlestick Injuries for Waste Workers

This article was contributed by Mike Burns of State Compensation Insurance Fund, CRRC's Workers Compensation insurance carrier and is an Associate Member of the CRRC.

Every year, two to three billion syringes are used outside of healthcare facilities; most of these are from insulin injections and illegal drug use. Used syringes are not always disposed of safely; they may be left in public restrooms, parks and recreation area, or discarded in regular trash. Workers who are stuck with used syringes or other contaminated sharps are at risk of contacting HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and other bloodborne infections.

Recognize the Hazard

Employers should review their operations. If employees may encounter used syringes or other sharps waste during the course of their work, it is important that they know the hazards of these sharps. Employees should also know what medical devices they may encounter look like, for example syringes, hypodermic needles, pen needles, intravenous needles, and lancets.

Use Safe Work Practices

Employers must plan on the safe handling of sharps waste before it is encountered. It is important that employees know and follow safe work practices

to minimize their risk of injuries from needles and other sharps. Below are some suggested work practices.

- Wear suitable gloves. They should be puncture resistant and protect against potential contamination.
- Do not place hands into areas or objects where you cannot see.
- With some sharps it may be difficult to avoid the sharp end. Use tongs or tools to pick up these items.
- Once a syringe or other sharp

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is picked up, it should be placed directly into a sharps container.

- Do not manually compress trash bags.

In Case of Injury

Employers should develop procedures for handling sharps injuries. Employees stuck by a needle or other sharp should immediately flood the exposed area with water and clean any wound with soap and water

or a skin disinfectant. Report the injury immediately to the employer and seek immediate medical attention for post-exposure management.

Develop and Implement an Exposure Control Plan

Anytime there is occupational exposure to blood or other potentially infectious material, Cal/OSHA requires the employer to establish and implement a written Exposure Control Plan. State Compensation Insurance Fund has the resources to assist you with your safety and reporting needs; contact your representative or visit the website at <http://www.scif.com>.

Mike Burns, of State Compensation Insurance Fund, would be pleased to answer your questions or discuss this article further. You can contact Mike at (925) 523-5952.

Be sure to check the Safety Resources area of the CRRC website. CRRC believes that creating a culture of safety benefits all of our members and the communities they serve. This page and all of its content were created to fulfill that goal. If you have an article or resource that you'd like to share with your fellow members, please contact Trith Roath at trish@crrenorth.org, or at 916-444-CRRC.