

Loss Prevention Standards

Clinical Waste Disposal

Introduction

Clinical Waste was defined in the Controlled Waste Regulations 1992, now replaced by the Controlled Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2012, as 'any waste consisting wholly or partly of human or animal tissue, blood or other body fluids, excretions, drugs or other pharmaceutical products, swabs, dressings, syringes, needles or other sharp instruments, being waste which unless rendered safe may prove hazardous to any person coming into contact with it'.

It also includes any other waste arising from medical, nursing, dental, veterinary, pharmaceutical or similar practice, investigation, treatment, care, teaching or research or the collection of blood for transfusion, that the waste may cause infection to any person coming into contact with it.

Clinical waste is regarded as falling into one of two main types:

- Waste which poses a risk of infections
- Medicinal waste

Employers must ensure that the risks from clinical waste are properly controlled by assessing the risks, developing policies, putting arrangements in place to manage the risks and monitoring how these arrangements work.

Hazards of Clinical Waste

A wide range of infections can occur when these agents come into contact with broken skin or with the eyes, nose and mouth. It is important to consider all biological wastes as infectious. Examples of diseases that may be transmitted by clinical waste include various forms of Hepatitis, Escherichia Coli (E. coli) infection, Tuberculosis, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA), and in addition ill-health due to digestive problems including diarrhoea, etc.

Who May be at Risk From Exposure to Clinical Waste?

Many workers in the healthcare sector ranging from doctors and nurses, to residential home staff and waste disposal workers may be at risk from contact with clinical waste.

Precautions

Employees who may be exposed to clinical waste should follow the set of precautions outlined below.

Education

- Employers must provide information on the hazards to health and associated risks posed by clinical waste to employees and others who may come into contact with it
- Employees should be trained in why they need and how to use personal protective equipment (PPE) in addition to the safe handling and disposal of clinical waste
- All persons at risk must be instructed on who to report to if they are exposed and where to obtain immediate treatment



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Personal Hygiene

- Frequent hand washing is an effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in workplaces. Hygienic washroom facilities must be provided including hot water, soap and towels, etc.
- Hands should be washed thoroughly, by wetting the soap and lathering the hands for at least 10 seconds, especially after contact with bodily waste or any contaminated objects or surfaces
- As part of hand washing it is important to wash and scrub fingernails and cuticles with a small brush and to rinse hands thoroughly before drying

Protective Barriers

- Wherever possible gloves should be worn when staff are likely to come into contact with clinical waste.
NOTE: Latex gloves carry with them a risk of allergy, however in certain circumstances they are regarded by workers as much better than other types such as nitrile gloves which are not considered a universal replacement. It is necessary therefore to restrict their use to essential situations where there is a risk of contamination with blood or other bodily fluids. They should not be used for general procedures and staff should be screened for latex allergy and offered an alternative where indicated
- The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Regulations 1992, require employers to provide and maintain PPE in good condition, train employees in their correct use and ensure they are used when appropriate
- Protective barriers reduce the risk of exposure to potentially infectious material through contact with broken skin or mucous membranes. All breaks in the skin should be kept covered with waterproof dressings
- Good quality gloves should be provided and worn
- Gloves are also necessary for disinfecting contaminated surfaces and disposing of used materials and biological materials (wash hands thoroughly with warm water and soap after removing gloves)
- Gloves should be changed after each task and disposed of as contaminated waste
- Protective safety spectacles and a mask must be provided and worn when there is a risk of blood, body fluids or faeces splashing onto the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose or mouth
- Gowns, lab coats or aprons must be provided and worn when there is a likelihood of clothing becoming soiled. Contaminated clothing and linen should be laundered at a temperature of at least 80 degrees Celsius, or by a specialist company, or incinerated

Safe Handling and Disposal of Contaminated Material

Special precautions must be observed when disposing of clinical/biological waste and materials which have become contaminated, and suitable training must be provided to employees and others who may be exposed, e.g. volunteers.

Employers must have a written Disposal of Contaminated Waste Procedure for the safe disposal of contaminated waste. The UK Government recommends that a senior member of the management team is appointed clinical waste control officer, to oversee the clinical waste policy which should include the following:

- Disposal of waste in puncture resistant containers lined with leak-proof plastic bags marked as biological waste
- Presume all biological waste is infectious
- Wear puncture resistant gloves and handle all contaminated wastes carefully to avoid direct contact
- Hold only the outsides of the container when handling and never reach in
- Do not load containers beyond capacity or compact the contents
- Never mix biological waste with other domestic or workplace rubbish
- Sharp objects which can cut or puncture skin may carry infectious materials. Always handle with care and follow safe 'sharps' practice

Controls on the Disposal of Clinical Waste

There are stringent controls in place to ensure that clinical waste is managed safely and is recovered or disposed of without harming the environment or human health. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) it is unlawful to deposit, recover or dispose of controlled (including clinical) waste without a waste management licence, contrary to the conditions of a licence or the terms of an exemption, or in any way which causes pollution of the environment or harm to human health. Contravention of waste controls is a criminal offence. Section 34 of the EPA places those concerned with controlled (including clinical) waste under a 'Duty of Care' to ensure that the waste is managed properly, recovered or disposed of safely and is only transferred to someone who is authorised to keep it. Householders are exempt in respect of their own household waste.

Some wastes are considered to present a particularly high risk to health or the environment and require special handling and treatment. The Hazardous Waste Regulations, which came into force in July 2005, set out the regime for the control and tracking of hazardous waste in England and Wales. Under these Regulations, a process of registration of hazardous waste producers and a new system for recording the movement of waste was introduced.

From 1st April 2016, premises in England no longer need to register as hazardous waste producers with the Environment Agency (EA). This change only applies to England; it does not affect premises in Wales who should continue to register with Natural Resources Wales.

A waste is defined as hazardous if it is listed in the List of Wastes Regulations, which is a copy of the European Waste Catalogue (EWC) list produced by the European Commission following the Hazardous Waste Directive 1991. There are other ways a waste can be defined as hazardous, e.g. if the Secretary of State says it is or if it is classified as hazardous in other legislation, such as that controlling asbestos disposal, but for the great majority of wastes we can rely on the List of Wastes and the EWC.

The Environment Agency is responsible for administering the hazardous waste regime. Guidance on how to assess the hazardous properties of waste can be found in Annex C of their guidance document: [Technical Guidance WM3: Guidance on the Classification and Assessment of Waste](#).

Additional Information

- [Health and Safety Executive: Biological Hazards at Work](#)
- [Department of Health: Health Technical Memorandum – 07-01: Safe Management of Healthcare Waste](#)

Further risk management information can be obtained from [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#)

Please Note

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