



Matthews University



Elder Davis

“Did You Know”™ Educational Series



Issue No.126-05

A Publication of Matthews Cremation Division

CREMATORY OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE AND CONTROL

Should crematory workers be trained in exposure control?

Yes. Absolutely, yes.

The cremation professional receiving a body often doesn't know the cause of death. The disease process that caused death may not be identified; the cause of death may be incorrectly identified, or confidentiality may have been claimed for the deceased. For this reason, OSHA requires that all blood and body fluids must be assumed to be infected, and considers blood to be the most significant source of infectious HIV (AIDS), HBV (Hepatitis B) and tuberculosis.

Many professionals believe that the embalming process eliminates all pathogens by sterilizing the body. This is not true. Some pathogens can survive for over 24 hours after embalming.

Employers (funeral homes, cemeteries, crematories, etc.) are responsible for developing an Exposure Control Plan: a set of written guidelines designed to help the worker recognize exposure risks in the workplace and take appropriate precautions to minimize those risks. The Exposure Control Plan includes training in work practice controls and the use of personal protective equipment.

Some work practice controls are:

- Personal work habits.
- Standard procedures for cleaning contaminated surfaces.
- Body substance isolation.
- Assessing risk in specific tasks.

Personal Work Habits

Always wear gloves, and wash your hands after removing them when you have been exposed to body fluids, blood or other possibly infectious materials. Hand washing prevents the spread of infection to you, and to others through you. It is the most important work habit for reducing the risk of communicable disease exposure.

Blowing your nose will help remove dust particles and airborne pathogens after you leave the area of the deceased.

If you wear glasses, remove gloves and wash your hands before pushing your glasses up.

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Standard Procedures for Cleaning Contaminated Surfaces

Good housekeeping helps prevent the transmission of communicable diseases:

- Cleanliness of the work area.
- Orderly arrangement of supplies.
- Prompt removal of waste.

All contaminated surfaces must be cleaned after use. This is called terminal cleaning. Use a 1:10 solution of bleach and water, or an approved disinfectant cleaning solution. Always wear gloves when sterilizing surfaces.

Body Substance Isolation

It has been estimated that some form of infectious process is going on in three out of every four dead bodies.

Body substance isolation is the wrapping of a body in a moisture-proof sheet or body pouch until cremation or burial takes place. This should be practiced wherever there is risk of exposure to communicable disease.

Assessing Risk in Job Tasks

As you begin a job task, ask yourself what you are going to be doing. If there is a likelihood of contact with blood or body substances, in what area do you expect contact? Wear the appropriate personal protective gear to prevent the expected contact.

If exposure does occur:

- Immediately flush mucous membranes (eyes, mouth, nose) with a lot of water.
- Wash skin surface with soap and water.
- Contact your supervisor and seek medical attention immediately.
- Fill out an incident report. This is essential for follow-up care.

Using Personal Protective Equipment in the Workplace

Personal protective equipment includes any or all of the following disposable items, to be worn or used by the worker when there is a risk of exposure to blood or body fluids:

- Gloves
- Coverall
- Face shield
- Gown
- Antimicrobial wipes
- Hair cover
- Face mask
- Apron
- Shoe covers
- Goggles

Other protective barrier equipment:

- Body pouch
- Moisture-proof sheet
- Biohazard labels
- Plastic bags

Careful use of barriers reduces your chance of exposure to communicable disease. Barriers create a safe environment in which you can do your job.

Users of personal protective equipment must be aware that the equipment does not eliminate the hazard. If the equipment fails, exposure will occur. Selection of the proper personal protective equipment for a job is important.

Gloves are needed when handling human remains. Your clothing should be protected from contamination by a clinic coat or coverall. Hand washing is an important practice after all job activities.

All regulated waste (material containing infected blood or body fluids) should be identified with a red bag or container, or a biohazard label.