

FORMALDEHYDE SPILL PROTOCOL FOR PATIENT CARE LOCATIONS

Medical care personnel preserve human specimens by placing them into a container of formalin, a solution containing 3.7% formaldehyde. Two of the major requirements of the OSHA's Formaldehyde Standard, 29CFR1910.1048, includes special labels on formaldehyde containers and having an established spill plan. This protocol has been established specifically for those locations where specimen containers are used or stored.

Opening/closing specimen containers does not result in over-exposures or adverse health effects. However, in a spill situation, respiratory and skin irritation can occur. To minimize exposures, storage containers must be stored properly and personnel must be aware of action to take should a spill occur. This protocol is applicable for all SMH locations.

STORAGE REQUIREMENTS

Minimize the number of specimen containers in a location. The following guideline is recommended for medical care locations:

1. Central storage locations are to be non-patient care areas that are ventilated. The quantity stored in these locations should be limited to a one-month's supply for any size container. The specimen containers should be kept in the original shipping container. If bins are used, the containers are to be stored stacked upright in the bin to minimize potential spills. A label is to be placed on the shelf, cabinet, or bin to identify the formaldehyde storage location.
2. Storage in patient care rooms is to be limited to one week's supply. A recommended location is a labeled upper cabinet or a single drawer.

SPILL PROCEDURE

The EMERGENCY 13 Flip Chart was prepared to assist personnel on the action to take for emergency situations. Please refer to this chart for detailed information. Additional information is available through the EH&S's Occupational Safety Unit (x5-3241).

Commercially prepared specimen containers have tight fitting tops that have little probability of leaking. The most likely spill would be from a single container or from an open specimen container. Depending upon the size of the container, the quantity of fluid is usually low (less than 100 ml) and is considered a minor spill, capable of being cleaned up quickly, without the assistance of safety and emergency personnel. The following steps are to be taken:

1. Evacuate non-essential personnel from the room.
2. Wearing at least gloves and an outer garment, absorb the spilled fluid with paper towels. Place the paper towels into a heavy-duty waste bag (not red).
3. Wash the contaminated area with soap and water. Dry the area with paper towels and place the towels into the waste bag. Seal the bag to minimize the release of formaldehyde vapors and place it into the waste receptacle in the soiled utility room for disposal.

If you have any questions on this protocol, contact the EH&S's Occupational Safety Unit at 275-3241 or EH&S's Environmental Compliance Unit at 275-2056.