APPENDIX 4

FORMALDEHYDE SPILL PROTOCOL
FOR PATIENT CARE LOCATIONS

Formaldehyde solutions are used by medical care personnel for the preservation of specimens. Typically, the concentration of these solutions is 37% formaldehyde, commonly called formalin. OSHA’s Formaldehyde Standard, 29CFR1910.1048, requires special labels on all formaldehyde containers. Locations that store or use formaldehyde containing materials must have an established spill plan to comply with the OSHA standard. This protocol has been established specifically for those locations where specimen containers are used or stored.

Formaldehyde solutions can present a health hazard from inhalation and direct skin contact. Acute exposures to formaldehyde solutions can cause eye and skin irritations. Exposure to vapors can result in respiratory and eye irritation. To minimize possible exposures, storage containers must be stored according to the requirements listed below, and personnel must be aware of action to take should a spill occur.

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 properly ventilated. The quantity stored in these locations should be restricted to a one month’s supply for any size container. The specimen containers should be kept in the original shipping container, if possible. If bins are used, the containers are to 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 Occupational Safety Unit (275-3241).

Commercially prepared specimen containers have tight fitting tops that have a very low probability of leaking. The most likely spill would be 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 without the assistance of safety and emergency personnel. The following steps are to be taken:

1. Inform others in the area of the minor spill.
2. Wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment to prevent exposure (minimum of gloves and an outer garment), absorb the spilled material with paper towels. Place the paper towels into a labeled hazardous waste container, such as a heavy duty bag.
3. Wash the contaminated area two times with some soap and water. Dry the area with paper towels. Place these paper towels into the labeled hazardous waste container. Seal the container to minimize the release of formaldehyde vapors.
4. Dispose of the labeled hazardous waste container through Environmental Compliance / Hazardous Waste (call x5-2056 for a pick up – for SMH on-site locations only).