

# SAFETY IN THE MEDICAL WORKPLACE—PART 2

Taking safety precautions across the map will improve office morale and reduce expenses.

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In my last article, I wrote about many external and primary internal concerns regarding patient and a few employee safety issues (visit [www.ModernAesthetics.com](http://www.ModernAesthetics.com) to read the article). The article concluded with a simple question: “Do you have any idea how much profit safety adds to your bottom line?” Now let’s frame that question in a different context, one focusing on internal safety risks, hazards, and concerns your employees and practice may be subject to, and most importantly how we can prevent them from happening in the first place.

Given these factors, the question therefore becomes, “Do you know how much it can cost you by not having a safety prevention program?” Safety must start from the top (practice/spa owner) and be at the forefront of everyone’s mind. Safety is a culture, both personally and professionally. It cannot be thought of as a burden, but rather an added value to your patients and your staff. Remember: Safety is everyone’s responsibility.

## SAFETY ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

**ISSUE:** When was the last time we took a look at our Safety Data Sheets (SDS) (formerly Material Safety Data Sheets or MSDS) and ensured that they even existed? These are information sheets that describe the contents of every chemical in your workplace and list in the health, flammability, and reactivity in the event of chemical exposure via ingestion, inhalation, or dermal contact. Not only is it an important facet to assist in safety precautions, but it is also a federal law in regards to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA); 29CFR Section 1910.1200, also known as The Employee Right to Know Act.

**SOLUTION:** All employees should be aware of each and every chemical in the workplace and the hazards they present. The employee who handles the ordering of your supplies or your laser safety officer should be the designated safety officer. A log of all of your chemicals should be consistently updated to ensure all of your chemicals are listed in the event of an emergency. The purpose of these safety sheets is so that emergency response personnel (EMS

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and hospital Emergency Room staff) have the knowledge to properly react in the unlikely event of exposure.

According to OSHA, the basic requirements of The Employee Right to Know Act are:

- A written hazard communication program
- A list of hazardous chemicals (such as alcohol, disinfectants, anesthetic agents, sterilants,) used or stored in the office
- A copy of the SDS for each chemical (obtained from the manufacturer) used or stored in the office

## EMPLOYEE TRAINING

**ISSUE:** Do you have proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in your facility? The purpose of PPE is to eliminate the potential exposure of chemicals, biomedical and human waste and fluids coming in contact with your employees either by spillage, needle sticks, inhalation, etc.

PPE may include but is not limited to gloves, goggles, barrier gowns, masks, head and foot covers, as per OSHA 29CFR Section 1910.132, Personal Protective Equipment.

**SOLUTION:** Annualized training for all of your employees should be conducted to ensure their knowledge and protection against any/all hazards in the workplace.

In addition, OSHA sites the following:

**1910.132(a):** Application. Protective equipment, including personal protective equipment for eyes, face, head, and extremities, protective clothing, respiratory devices, and protective shields and barriers, shall be provided, used, and maintained in a sanitary and reliable condition wherever it is necessary by reason of hazards of processes or environment, chemical hazards, radiological hazards, or mechanical irritants encountered in a manner capable of causing injury or impairment in the function of any part of the body through absorption, inhalation or physical contact.

**1910.132(b):** Employee-owned equipment. Where employees provide their own protective equipment, the employer shall be responsible to assure its adequacy, including proper maintenance, and sanitation of such equipment.

**1910.132(c):** Design. All personal protective equipment shall be of safe design and construction for the work to be performed.

**1910.132(d)(2):** The employer shall verify that the required workplace hazard assessment has been performed through a written certification that identifies the workplace evaluated; the person certifying that the evaluation has been performed; the date(s) of the hazard assessment; and, which identifies the document as a certification of hazard assessment.

**1910.132(e):** Defective and damaged equipment. Defective or damaged personal protective equipment shall not be used.

While there are many more safety precautions regarding PPE, it is always your responsibility to ensure each and every employee is receives a safe work environment.

**ISSUE:** Has an employee ever been accidentally squirted in the eye with any type of substance while at work? This can happen to anyone, and proper precautions must be taken.

**SOLUTION:** Have an eyewash station located in a secure area of your practice and, if you are a surgery center, you should have a minimum of two eyewash stations located in your practice. One should be located in the exam room area, and the other as close to the operating rooms as possible.

Eyewash stations can either be self-contained portable devices or permanently fixed to a high pressure faucet. They are devised so that when the water is turned on, they can bilaterally shoot water or a flushing agent into the affected eye(s). They are not expensive devices and can be purchased from most of your medical suppliers.

**ISSUE:** Do you have safety goggles for laser or other procedures you perform in your office? You might have said yes to this question but do you have different goggles for various procedures? Are they ANSI approved?

What's ANSI you ask? ANSI is the governing standard for American National Standards Institute that works in

cooperation with OSHA. OSHA has the statutory authority to develop, promulgate and enforce occupational safety and health standards and ANSI is recognized as a coordinating and approval agency for voluntary national consensus standards in the United States, and is ready to provide assistance and support in occupational safety and health standards, regulations and related issues.

**SOLUTION:** Only purchase ANSI approved safety goggles. The letters "ANSI" are stamped on the earpiece of all ANSI-approved safety goggles. The goggles must have side shields to prevent exposure from indirect frontal access. The actual shield itself have a level of impact resistance.

Not all safety goggles are alike. When you perform laser procedures, know that the type of safety goggles vary in color to ward off the intensity of the laser depending on the level of the light emitted. Some goggles actually have safety shutters which close automatically when the laser light is detected.

Do not attempt to repair the lens if it breaks. Dispose of the goggles and replace them. The cost is well worth the investment. I have never come to understand why people will purchase lens covers for their very expensive camera lens, yet they will try to bargain shop and negotiate on the one and only pair of eyes.

## EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY

Safety in the workplace should never be taken lightly. Training is one of the key factors in prevention of workplace injuries and accidents. Although training and purchasing safety supplies and equipment can be costly at times, the cost can never replace the human element of an employee's injury or illness.

Lost time in the workplace is also an expensive element to consider, along with the stress of staff performing additional duties with less staffing. This makes your employees more prone to injuries by having to rush to get the same amount of work accomplished.

Safety is not just right thing to do but the only thing to do. Safety is everyone's responsibility. ■



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