

M10-EN.12 LAUNDRY

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M10-EN.12.1 Contaminated Laundry

Contaminated Laundry can be defined, as the laundry, which has been soiled with blood or other potentially infectious material or may contain sharps.

Potential Hazard

Laundry employees can be exposed to blood or other potentially infectious materials through contaminated laundry that was improperly labelled, or handled.

Safety Precautions

- Try to handle this kind of laundry as little as possible with minimal agitation
- Bag contaminated laundry at the location of use. Do not sort or rinse laundry at the location where it was used. Use labelled bags (with the biohazard symbol) for transferring laundry
- Place and transport the wet contaminated laundry that presents a likelihood of soak-through of or leakage from the bag/container; in colour-coded bags/containers that prevent soak-through and/or leakage of fluids to the exterior
- Never hold the contaminated laundry bags close to your body or squeeze them while transportation, to avoid any punctures from improperly discarded syringes
- Use the normal laundry cycles in accordance with the recommendations of washer and detergent manufacturer
- Wear appropriate PPE (such as gloves, gowns, face shields, masks, etc) while handling and/or sorting contaminated laundry
- Use thick utility gloves while sorting contaminated laundry
- The bags used for the bagging process must be melted away. They can be thrown directly into washers without unload or remove contaminated laundry from them

M10-EN.12.2 Hazardous Chemicals

Those working at the laundry department are exposed to hazardous cleaning chemicals found and used during the laundry or housekeeping process. Exposure can occur due to:

- Chemicals that are not labelled
- Soaps and detergents that can cause allergic reactions and sometimes dermatitis
- Splattering while pouring from larger containers to smaller ones

If an employee has broken skin from soap or detergent irritation, this may provide an avenue for infection or injury if exposed to chemical hazards. (Link M10-EN.3.4)

M10-EN.12.3 Sharps Handling

It is possible that laundry departments allow the employees to rinse contaminated laundry (i.e. laundry contaminated with blood or OPIM or that might contain sharps), in specified dirty utility rooms, instead of simply containerizing it and then transporting it to the laundry. In these cases, the personnel can be exposed to blood borne pathogens from the contaminated laundry containing sharps. (Link M10-EN6.1.5).

M10-EN.12.4 Latex Allergy

Exposure of employees to latex allergy from wearing latex gloves, while handling or sorting contaminated laundry. (Link: M10-EN.3.5)

M10-EN.12.5 Noise

Laundry employees are exposed to high noise levels because of loud machinery used in the laundry area. This can lead to induced hearing loss, hearing impairment, hypertension, elevated blood pressure levels and other health hazards. (M10.12.1.jpg)

Employers are required to:

- Identify every hazards occurring from noise exposure through a safety and health program
- Introduce means of control and protection of employees' hearing. For example use of less noisy machinery, sound insulating equipment, appropriate PPE (earplugs, earmuffs, etc)

Safety Precautions

Engineering and **work practice controls** that aid the decrease of occupational noise exposure levels include:

- Reduction of the amount of sound energy released by the noise source (laundry machines)
- Diversion of the flow of sound energy away from the worker (use of protective shields or barrier)
- Protection of the receiver from the sound energy reaching him/her (e.g. use of PPE, such as ear muffs)

- Proper maintenance of equipment, equipment replacements
- Revision of the operating procedures, equipment redesign, enclosures
- Acoustical shields and barriers
- Personal protective equipment for ear protection (earmuffs, earplugs, earphones, etc) for the elimination or decrease of noise exposure

M10-EN.12.6 Fire Safety

In the work area of laundry, fire hazard is increased, because of lint build-up on ceilings and other surfaces such as heat producing equipment.

Employers must ensure that all **Safety Precautions** are taken, such as:

- Control of any accumulation of flammable and combustible waste materials and residues so that they do not contribute to a fire emergency
- Provide suitable storage containers for flammable substances, ventilation systems to dilute or remove flammable gas, extraction systems to remove combustible materials, and equipment selected not to be a source of ignition are key elements for the elimination of fire
- Provide employees with training on fire hazards of the materials and processes to which they are exposed
- Regular and proper maintenance of systems installed on heat producing equipment, for the prevention of accidental ignition of combustible materials
- Provide at least two exits or means of egress exist, in case of emergency. These exits must be clearly marked, and access to them must remain clear of any obstruction at all times.
- Establishing means of detecting and giving warning in case of fire
- Provide fire-fighting equipment. This emergency fire equipment must be readily accessible and in good working condition

Portable fire extinguishers divide into five categories according to the extinguishing medium they contain:

- carbon dioxide
- powder
- foam
- water
- vaporizing liquids, including halons

Fire extinguishers should usually be located in conspicuous positions on escape routes, preferably near exit doors. The location of the extinguishers should be indicated by signs and, where appropriate, directional arrows. Where possible, fire extinguishers must hang on wall brackets. Where this is impracticable, extinguishers can stand on a suitable base-plate and not on the floor. Fire hose cabinets can be used for the storing, and the protection of hose reels and fire extinguishers. The most useful form of fire-fighting equipment for general fire risks is the water-type extinguisher or hose reel.

M10-EN.12.7 Heat Stress

Employees are exposed to excessive heat in the laundry area. This can result in heat exhaustion and heat stroke. When they work in high temperatures, their body circulates great amounts of blood to their skin trying to eliminate heat through perspiration. As a result, less blood is circulated to the body's vital organs including brain. Heat exhaustion can lead to dizziness, blurred vision, nausea, and eventual collapse. If not treated promptly, by lowering body's temperature, it can lead to a possible brain damage.

Heat stroke is much more serious than heat exhaustion. During heat stroke the body stops sweating, something that makes it impossible to disperse heat. By this, the body temperature may rise to a dangerously high level in a short time causing death.

Potential Hazard

Laundry employees can be exposed to excessive heat. This may lead to heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and possible death. (M10.12.2.jpg, M10.12.3.jpg)

Safety Precautions

In addition with the precautions from the employer (Link: M10-EN.9.9), the **employees** are encouraged to:

- Perform the heaviest work in the coolest part of the day
- Understand the danger of using drugs, including therapeutic ones, and alcohol in hot work environments, and avoid their use. These beverages make the body lose water and increase the risk for heat illnesses
- Know how to recognize the need to replace fluids and salt lost through perspiration

M10-EN.12.8 Ergonomics

Employers must address the ergonomic stressors that can occur with lifting, reaching, rinsing, and transporting wet heavy laundry. The use of a lift or transfer device for the lifting of these materials is recommended. Unnecessary reaching/pushing and/or lifting wet heavy laundry can result in work related musculoskeletal disorders such as strains and wrenches of the back or shoulder area.

Safety Precautions

An assessment should take place at he laundry area in order to identify the ergonomic stressors and find ways for their decrease, such as:

Using proper lifting techniques:

- Avoid lifting bulky or awkwardly weighted objects
- Avoid lifting/reaching or working above shoulder height
- Avoid awkward postures, such as twisting while lifting
- Lift items close to the body
- Limit the weight of the item to be lifted
 - Use well maintained carts (M10.12.4.jpg - M10.12.6.jpg)

- Use mechanical aids such as platforms lifting wet heavy laundry, and keeping it at a comfortable uniform work level; and washers that automatically dump their loads into baskets (see also previous chapters) (**M10.12.7.jpg**)

M10-EN.12.9 Slip/Trips/Falls

Laundry personnel are exposed to slips/trips/falls from the wet floors found in the laundry area. (Link: M10-EN.3.7)