

Does Your Store Need a Blood Borne Pathogens Policy?

Grocers in Washington State need to have numerous safety policies in place, as required by federal and state mandates. One standard that many grocers don't readily consider or understand is the Bloodborne Pathogens (BBP) in the workplace.

Having a BBP is designed to protect workers from the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens, such as the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). A policy would apply to all employees who have occupational exposure to human blood, or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM). Where a policy can get confusing, is how it would apply to a grocery store, especially because stores and associated industries normally do not encounter situations where BBP are present.

OSHA and the Department of Labor and Industries' stance, is that if it's likely that someone would be exposed to blood in the workplace, than they must follow the BBP standard and have a BBP policy in place. The OSHA standard defines occupational exposure as reasonably anticipated skin, eye, mucous membrane, or parenteral contact with blood or other potentially infectious materials that may result from the performance of an employee's duties. OSHA has stated that an employee who is designated as responsible for rendering first-aid or medical assistance as part of their job duties, are to be covered by the BBP standard (Clark, 1992).

Considering that grocery industry workplaces have the potential for accidents and trauma, it can be concluded that employees designated to render first-aid will have occupational exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials. *Employees who perform unanticipated "Good Samaritan acts", however, are not covered by the standard since such actions do not constitute occupational exposure as defined by the standard (Clark, 1992).*

What You Need to Know

- Most employees in grocery stores are unlikely to be exposed to bloodborne pathogens. *However, if an employee is designated and responsible for rendering first-aid or medical assistance as part of their job duties, then the bloodborne pathogen standard MUST be implemented.*
- It is the employer's responsibility to conduct a hazard assessment and determine whether there are any employees with occupational exposure as defined in WAC 296-823, Bloodborne pathogens

WFIA's third party administrator, Employer Resources Northwest (ERNWest), is available to answer any questions that pertain to bloodborne pathogens in the workplace, and the impact they can have on your employees. Please contact WFIA's Group Manager, David Swoish, at (800) 433-7601 x809 with any questions you have.