Protect Your Employees from Blood-borne Pathogens

Exposure to blood-borne pathogens is a hazard most people think is limited to health care workers. The truth is that nearly every work environment — especially those in which hand tools and heavy equipment are used — is at risk for blood-borne pathogen contamination. Improper care can lead to the transmission of serious, and sometimes deadly, diseases.

What Are Blood-borne Pathogens?
Blood-borne pathogens, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, are “infectious microorganisms in human blood that can cause disease in humans.” HIV, AIDS, hepatitis, syphilis, and malaria, are some of the more common diseases the pathogens carry. They transmit diseases via contact with bodily fluids, often through cuts, open sores, acne, or any damaged or broken skin.

How to Protect Your Employees
The first and best way to protect against contact with blood-borne pathogens is to avoid accidents and injuries. Solid policies and procedures (general housekeeping and sanitation included), mixed with the use of appropriate personal protective equipment, will help keep exposures down. But in the event that blood or other bodily fluids are present in the workplace, all your employees should be familiar with universal precautions and assume that all bodily fluids carry disease-causing pathogens. This approach, generally meant for health care settings, but adopted for general use, includes:

- Wearing gloves, masks, and other non-porous protective clothing if exposed to bodily fluids
  - This includes mouth-to-mouth resuscitation masks if necessary
- Using caution when handling sharp objects, needles, and waste
- Disinfecting the contamination area thoroughly
- Washing hands with soap and water as soon as possible
- Changing and washing clothing as soon as possible

If Direct Exposure Occurs
If an employee is exposed to a bodily fluid, wash or flush the area for at least 15 minutes, and contact a medical professional immediately. Be sure to consult with a qualified attorney to understand what obligations you may have, such as providing medical evaluations, should an exposure occur.

You never know what could be lurking within a bodily fluid. Always exercise caution when dealing with potential exposure.