



Safety in Funeral Directors

The following details highlight some of the hazards that might exist in a funeral directors. They are by no means exhaustive and will vary depending on your own particular business. As a starting point, use the blank sheet provided in this pack to carry out your own simple risk assessment.

Main Types of Hazards

Manual Handling

Back injuries or muscular strain could be caused when:

- lifting and moving the deceased,
- moving and lifting both empty and full coffins/caskets.
- carrying coffins at funerals.

Managing the Risk

- assess all manual handling activities carried out by your employees.
- where possible avoid manual handling particularly for heavy or awkward loads. Instead, consider the use of stretchers, body scoops, roll-in multi-level cots, trolleys, church trucks, vehicles etc.
- lay out your funeral premises to aid the movement and storage of coffins, stretchers and trolleys.
- train staff in safe lifting techniques and practices such as how to use mechanical aids. Staff should avoid carrying coffins up and down stairs.
- as a general rule at least two people should be used to lift an empty coffin or to carry out a removal and at least four people to bear an adult's coffin.

Slips, Trips and Falls

Slips, trips and falls may be caused by:

- uneven, slippery, obstructed and poorly lit walkways.
- trailing cables and poor housekeeping.

- ensure all walkways are well lit, have a non-slip surface and are kept free from obstruction and trailing electrical cables.
- clean up spillages immediately and display warning signs.
- ensure staff avoid steps, stairs and uneven surfaces when carrying or moving loads.

Infection Control

Funeral staff may encounter potential sources of infection either directly when handling remains or indirectly when in contact with material or equipment contaminated with body fluids.

Infections can be transmitted by:

- contact with skin/abrasions
- inoculation (e.g. by needle pricks)
 - inhalation
- ingestion (e.g. by not washing hands before eating).
- eye contamination (e.g. by splashes of body fluids).

Infections of major concern include Tuberculosis, Aids or HIV, CJD, Hepatitis, Meningitis MRV's etc.

- make arrangements with hospitals, mortuaries, the police, nursing homes etc. to ensure you are informed in advance about serious infection hazards and given medical advice on how the body should be handled. This should allow you to decide whether embalming should be carried out.
- establish and document working procedures/handling instructions which will reduce the risk of infection transmission.

These should include:-

- how to maintain a high standard of personal hygiene.
- when to use protective clothing such as disposable gloves, overalls, visors, boots and overshoe. Arrangements should be made for the hygienic storage, cleaning and laundering of these articles.
- the use of protective clothing kits and body bags for collection of badly decomposed or infectious remains.
- procedures for the safe storage and disposal of waste materials from embalming e.g. "sharps" disposal containers.
- procedures for the prompt disinfection of contaminated parts of premises, equipment and vehicles.
- the provision of first aid facilities.
- an immunisation programme for staff (seek medical advice).



Hazardous Chemicals

Certain products used in the funeral business such as embalming fluids, vehicle cleaners, disinfectants etc, contain harmful substances.

Most of these substances will be labelled toxic, very toxic, harmful, irritant or corrosive.

- identify all the hazardous substances you use, obtain their hazard data sheets from the supplier and assess the risks to your staff.
- try to use the safest products available.
- ensure adequate ventilation in required areas such as embalming rooms.
- develop safe handling and spillage procedures and train staff.
- provide suitable protective clothing/equipment.
- supervise and monitor to ensure that safe procedures are being followed.
- determine whether you need to monitor employee exposure to certain chemicals and provide medical surveillance (seek advice from the Employment Medical Advisory Service, EMAS).

Formaldehyde

Most embalming fluids contain formaldehyde, a tissue preservative, which may cause burns on contact with the eye and irritation (dermatitis) on contact with the skin.

Formaldehyde vapours which are released when embalming fluids are exposed to the air can irritate the eyes, nose, upper respiratory tract and skin.

- choose embalming fluids with the lowest practical levels of formaldehyde.
- purchase small containers rather than large drums and store these in a well ventilated area. Display notices warning of the hazards.
- install a low level ventilation system in the embalming room which will ensure that the levels of formaldehyde in the atmosphere are kept below its maximum exposure limit (MEL) of 2 parts per million (ppm).
- promptly clean up any spillages and replace lids on containers and the embalming machine as quickly as possible. Pour the water into the embalming machine before the fluid.
- ensure staff wear full protective clothing to prevent skin and eye contact. Respirators should be worn when high levels of vapour are likely to be released, e.g. when pouring/decanting concentrated solutions, embalming a post-mortem case or when cleaning up a spillage.
- regularly monitor your employee's exposure using personal dose meters (seek advice from EMAS).
- home embalming should be avoided where possible as it is difficult to achieve many of the control measures mentioned above.

Vehicle Safety

Hazards may be associated with:-

- driving of vehicles -
- vehicle cleaning/valeting - due to use of hazardous substances.
- minor maintenance and repair work carried out on site such as when changing batteries, replacing oil/fuel or changing/inflating tyres.

- ensure your drivers are experienced and that your vehicles are well maintained. Passengers in limousines should always be asked to wear seat belts.
- within your premises ensure separate vehicle and pedestrian routes and devise a safe system for manoeuvring vehicles into and out of garages.
- provide adequate ventilation to garage areas and in particular battery charging areas.
- use the least hazardous valet cleaners and follow procedures for hazardous chemicals.
- protect outdoor electrical circuits with 30 mA residual current device (RCD).
- clean up oil spillages with absorbent material and keep ignition sources out of petrol storage areas.
- regularly inspect and repair all vehicle jacks, air lines etc. Air lines should be fitted with a "dead mans" handle.

■ For Further Information:

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