Procedure: Sharps handling

Purpose
To inform staff of the procedure for handling sharps and dealing with sharps injuries at the University.

Definitions
Control – Anything that is implemented to eliminate or reduce the risk of a hazard.

Exposure – Occurs when a person, property or the environment comes into contact with a hazard. The four routes of exposure for people are: inhalation, skin absorption, ingestion and inoculation.

Hazard – Anything that has the potential to cause harm

Risk – Risk is the effect of uncertainty on the University's work health and safety and is measured in terms of the likelihood of an event occurring and the consequences if it does.

Sharps – are objects or devices having sharp points or protuberances or cutting edges, capable of cutting or piercing the skin or the container in which they are packaged [5]. This includes plastic pipette tips.

Procedure

Emergency Information

1. Emergency needle stick injury queries should be initially directed to your first aid officer, local area management or safety officer, and then the Work Environment Group (OHS Branch x 52193). Emergency Services response is coordinated through the local area and ANU Security.

2. For after-hours emergency services response, contact ANU Security (x52249).

3. Members of the campus community who find a sharp on campus should not attempt to dispose of the sharp themselves. Contact ANU security (x52249) who will have appropriate equipment to dispose of the sharp.
Part 1: Introduction

4. This hazard management procedure has been developed by University to ensure the safe management of sharps within the University. In managing sharps, the University advocates a risk management approach to minimise the risks to staff, students, contractors and visitors in relation to the handling and disposal of sharps associated within the range of research, teaching and operational tasks undertaken within the University.

Part 2: Purpose

5. This document outlines procedures for safe work with sharps on the ANU campus.

6. Sharps are objects or devices having sharp points or protuberances or cutting edges, capable of cutting or piercing the skin [1]. Examples of sharps may include; needles, scalpel blades, Pasteur pipettes, plastic pipette tip, broken glass, razor blades or other similar objects.

7. Sharps pose a risk of injury due to their ability to puncture or cut the skin. Additionally, some sharps may be contaminated with human blood or body fluids, micro-organisms (genetically manipulated or otherwise), chemicals or radioactive material.

8. A number of areas on the ANU campus come into contact with sharps. These may include; researchers, technical and animal handling staff, medical school staff and students, gardens and grounds staff, security staff, housekeeping staff and first aid officers.

9. It is the responsibility of the local area to ensure that staff working with sharps are appropriately trained and aware of procedures for safe work with sharps.

Responsibilities

10. Supervisors are responsible for:

   • Undertaking a risk assessment for the use and handling of all sharps, in consultation with the relevant staff.

   • Managing, documenting and addressing the risks associated with sharps. When the risks are considered unacceptable the work shall not be undertaken. Modification to the handling protocol shall be made to ensure the risks are reduced and managed.

   • Providing and maintaining appropriate facilities and resources to ensure a
safe and healthy work environment.

- Providing clear and consistent supervision, instruction and training.

11. Sharps users are responsible for:

- Adhering and contributing to safe operating procedures and guidelines to ensure not only their safety, but also that of fellow staff, students, contractors, visitors, and the environment.
- Using appropriate facilities and resources to ensure a safe and healthy work environment.
- Reporting incidents via the University's online incident notification system.
- Managing and disposing of sharps in an approved manner.

Part 3: Managing Sharps at the ANU

Use or handling of sharps

12. Prior to commencing work with a sharp, a thorough risk assessment must be undertaken.

- Consider whether it is possible to complete the work without using a sharp.
- Consider whether there is a plastic, unbreakable or non-sharp object alternative
- If a sharp must be used, ensure that appropriate controls are in place, such as provision of Australian Standards (AS) approved sharps containers [2, 3], training and other administrative controls, and use of appropriate PPE
- Depending on how the sharp is to be used, vaccination against various diseases may be required by the University, see the Immunisation Procedure for details.

13. All staff must receive training by experienced staff in the safe use of sharps before commencing work with sharps.

14. All areas that come into contact with or use sharps must have Australian Standards approved sharps containers available for disposal of sharps. The sharps container should be located within arm’s reach of where the sharp is being used.

15. Sharps must not be passed hand to hand to another person for disposal or use; the initial user must dispose of the sharp immediately after use.

16. Forceps or a blade removal device must be used to remove scalpel blades. A tool should also be used to attach a scalpel blade where possible.

17. The sharp must be placed in the sharps container without using force to
push the sharp down. Allow the sharp to drop into the container. Never put hands or fingers into a sharps container.

18. Place the sharp in the disposal container with the sharp end down.

19. Needles must not be re-capped after use. Needles should not be deliberately bent, broken or otherwise manipulated by hand.

20. Once a sharps container reaches the ‘fill’ line, it must be closed and no more sharps added.

21. Full, single-use sharps containers must be disposed of via incineration. Re-usable sharps containers must be handled for emptying and cleaning only by the approved contractor.

22. Sharps containers should never be autoclaved due to the risk of the container becoming deformed and the sharps penetrating the plastic.

23. Sharps containers must never be lined with a bag, or used for purposes other than disposal of sharps (e.g. as general waste bins).

24. Gardeners or housekeeping staff who may come across used hypodermic needles in the course of their work should be supplied with appropriate training and equipment to pick up the sharp, (e.g. tongs) and an AS approved sharps container for disposal of the sharp.

25. Contractors and ANU staff undertaking demolition work must ensure any sharps containers present are removed from the building or structure prior to the work being undertaken.

Procedure for a sharps injury

26. The procedure varies depending on whether the sharp was clean or possibly contaminated. In all cases of sharps injury, the Work Environment Group must be notified of the incident via the online Incident notification system as soon as possible.

27. If the injury was with a clean/uncontaminated sharp or a sharp contaminated with a chemical or radioactive material, or a needle that has been inside a ‘clean’ (uninfected) animal:
   - Wash the site thoroughly with warm water and soap, but do not scrub
   - If the injury involves the eyes, nose or mouth, rinse the area thoroughly with copious amounts of warm water or saline (do not use antiseptics).
   - Dispose of the sharp into an appropriate sharps container
   - Consult with the local safety officer and the supervisor of the affected
person as to whether medical attention is required.

28. Injury with a sharp that may be contaminated with human pathogens, human blood or body fluids, potentially zoonotic organisms, or a sharp of unknown origin:

- Wash the site thoroughly with warm water and soap, but do not scrub
- Rinse with 80% v/v ethanol if available, or similar antiseptic solution (e.g., chlorhexidine)
- If the injury involves the eyes, nose or mouth, rinse the area thoroughly with copious amounts of warm water or saline (do not use antiseptics).
- Apply a sterile dressing to the wound. Apply pressure through the dressing to stem any bleeding if necessary.
- Place the sharp in a labelled, empty sharps container in case further analysis is required
- Visit a doctor as soon as possible (preferably within two hours). Consult with local Safety Officer and OHS Branch about what may be required at the doctor visit (what blood test is necessary, prophylactic medication, follow-up testing etc.).
- If there was an exposure to or spillage of regulated gene technology PC2 material, this needs to be notified to the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) as soon as possible.
- The affected person should be offered post-exposure counselling in conjunction with medical review.
- ANU Work Environment Group will notify Comcare of the incident as a serious personal injury.
- Investigation of the incident by OHS Branch will occur.

Training obligations/courses

29. Work Environment Group runs Biological Safety courses. Local area induction must cover relevant aspects of biological safety and sharps handling requirements