

E 260 - OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE TO VIRAL HEPATITIS AND AIDS

Policy:

The Company has a vital interest in maintaining a work environment which promotes the health, welfare and safety of all of its employees. This includes protection against the transmission of viral hepatitis and AIDS.

Plumbing and Fire Sprinkler contractors have grown increasingly concerned about hepatitis and AIDS as occupational health risks.

Infections, including hepatitis and AIDS, are transmitted when all of the following conditions are presented:

- There must be blood or other body fluids containing the virus.
- There must be an opening or pathway onto the body.
- There must be a means of getting the virus inside that opening.
- There must be a large enough quantity of the virus to cause infection.
- There must be a defense system without immunity to the virus.
- The risk of contracting AIDS is actually less than hepatitis because a much larger amount of the virus is needed to cause AIDS. There has not been a single reported case of transmission of the AIDS virus associated with occupational exposures to plumbers or sewage workers. For that reason, public health officials at the Centers for Disease Control do not consider possible exposure to the AIDS virus in sewage a significant risk. However, it would remain a theoretical risk, and no one can say with absolute certainty that it is not possible to contract AIDS in this way.
- There are two types of viral hepatitis, which differ somewhat in their mean of transmission, and one of them is commonly found in sewage. However, both types of hepatitis and AIDS can be prevented by following the same procedures of good hygiene in the field.

Procedure:

It is mandatory that employees adhere to the following procedure:

- Wear gloves that are not water absorbent and are restraint to punctures from sharp objects or sewer cleaning equipment (particularly if hands are cut or have open sores);
- Wear protective clothing, including goggles, if there is any chance of sewage spraying into the air;
- Change out of contaminated protective clothing as soon as the job is finished;
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially before eating or smoking.

- Wash contaminated gloves, clothing, and tools, and disinfect them with a disinfectant such as a fresh solution (1:10) of household bleach and water;

In summary, following good hygiene practices in the field and elsewhere cannot be overemphasized. It is your best precaution against the possibility of contracting infections, including viral hepatitis and AIDS.