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OSHA Updates Guidelines on Hazardous Drug Exposures

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A chapter supplying compliance inspectors with updated information on controlling occupational exposure to hazardous drugs will be added to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) technical manual for inspectors (OSHA Instruction CPL2-2.20B CH-4). The manual is designed to provide relevant information to OSHA inspectors when they are conducting investigations.

Responding to numerous inquiries, OSHA published guidelines in 1986 for the management of cytotoxic (antineoplastic) drugs in the workplace. Numerous requests for more information on the subject prompted OSHA to revise the 1986 guidelines and to expand them to cover hazardous drugs. The document cites recommendations from the American Society of Healthcare Pharmacists' guidelines on hazardous drugs. These include criteria for classifying drugs as hazardous; evidence supporting the management of hazardous drugs as an occupational hazard; development of standard operating procedures and identification of a person responsible for implementing a plan; recommended protective equipment and worker education; medical surveillance; and hazardous drugs in common use. Anesthetic agents are addressed elsewhere in the technical manual. According to an April 14, 1995, instruction signed by OSHA Administrator Joseph A. Dear, the guidelines apply to all settings where employees are exposed: hospitals, physicians' offices, and home healthcare agencies. OSHA recommends that healthcare employers implement the new guidelines.

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