

Tip of the Month



The \$132,598 Question

When could the right answer to an OSHA inspector's question cost you or your employer \$132,598? When you know the regulations but choose to ignore them.

Take glove use. If you work in healthcare in the U.S., you know the regulations. Gloving is a fundamental safety requirement for healthcare professionals whose assigned duties put them at risk for exposure to blood or other potentially infectious material. Wearing gloves during vascular access procedures such as drawing blood and IV starts, helps protect employees against exposure to bloodborne pathogens. It's not only smart, it's the law.

As required personal protective equipment (PPE), gloves serve as a barrier between you and a host of potential pathogens looking for a new home. As long as your gloves remain intact, so does your protection. And so does your compliance with the OSHA standards. Admittedly, gloves can't shield you from experiencing an accidental needlestick. But in the event you do, as the needle passes through the glove material, up to 86 percent of the inoculum is wiped away. So even in the case of an occupational exposure, the protective value afforded by glove use can't be discounted.

Employees who compromise the integrity of their gloves by removing the fingertip in order to palpate a vein place themselves outside the glove's protective barrier. They also place themselves out of compliance with OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens (BBP) and PPE Standards.

Consider the following: If an OSHA inspector was onsite at your facility for a general inspection and witnessed a phlebotomist or other staff member tearing off a glove tip for any reason, the first thing he would do is speak to the employee. The inspector would ask why the employee wore gloves in the first place. The employee would likely explain that PPE is required and/or gloves are worn to protect against exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

Once that was established, the OSHA inspector would cite the facility for "willful" violations of both the BBP and PPE standards. Each violation is \$132,598. Because two standards were willfully violated, the total fine for this one incident could be \$265,196. The facility could argue with the dollar amount and possibly reduce it a little, but the record and the citation would stand.

Healthcare professionals who calculate the cost of OSHA non-compliance, including potential harm to their personal health, career and reputation quickly realize it's a price nobody wants to pay. Remember, when the OSHA standards are reflected in both word and deed, employees help their employers remain citation-free.

So here's the \$132,598 Question: Will you risk not only your health for the "luxury" of ripping the tip of your glove off---or not wearing gloves at all---but also subject your employer to a six-figure penalty?