

Occupational Health Update

Law Would Boost Bioterrorism Preparedness

Representative Robert Menendez, D-N.J., introduced in November the Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2001, or BioPact. The measure is designed to strengthen the nation's ability to respond to a biological weapon of mass destruction.

The legislation, if enacted, would amend the Public Health Service Act to provide grants, scholarships and loans to "strengthen the nursing profession," and would establish the National Nursing Corps Scholarship Program. The bill also would authorize use of federal funds to:

- Increase the capacity, training and resources of hospitals to treat victims of bioterrorism
- Increase and improve vaccine and antibiotic supplies for attack victims
- Provide for the coordination. Training and equipment for emergency responders to acts of bioterrorism.

The bill also contains measures that would work to protect the nation's food and water supplies; provide biological and chemical agent detection devices at the U.S. borders; increase law enforcement and the military's ability to respond to biological attack; promote interagency cooperation to prevent and respond to bioterrorist attacks; and promote nonproliferation of chemical and biological weapons in other countries.

OSHA Updates Bloodborne Pathogens Standard

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration on November 28 issued a new compliance directive for enforcing the revised bloodborne pathogens standard. The standard covers occupational exposure to blood and other potentially infectious materials. The new directive guide OSHA officers who are charged with enforcing the standard.

The directive addresses the new requirements of the standard, including: evaluation and implementation of safer needle devices; involvement of frontline employees in selecting safer devices; establishment of a sharps injury log; and other documentation requirements. The directive contains detailed inspection instructions for compliance officers, as well as evaluation forms, a Web resource list and a model exposure control plan.

The complete directive is available at the OSHA Web site: www.osha.gov.