

Special Report: Contaminated Laundry And Risks

By Tom Taseski

OSHA defines contaminated laundry as laundry that has been soiled with blood or other potentially infectious materials or may contain sharps.

Some would say OSHA is just another over regulating arm of the government. On the other hand, OSHA has rules with the intent to keep patients, doctors and staff members safe and healthy.

How Should Contaminated Laundry Be Handled?

Which of the following regulations does your practice follow?
Which items are in OSHA violation?

- ✓ Employers must ensure staff members who have contact with contaminated laundry wear protective gloves and other appropriate personal protective equipment.
- ✓ Smocks, jackets, scrubs and towels should be placed into clearly labeled bags sufficient for staff members to understand what they contain.
- ✓ Wet garments must be placed into containers that prevent leakage of fluids to exterior.

Many dental practice owners do not realize that...

- Employees are NOT allowed to take their protective garments home and launder them.
- It is the responsibility of the employer to provide, launder, clean, repair, replace and dispose of personal protective equipment.

What's the big deal about cleaning dental garments at home?

- The highest temp a home water heater gets is 130 degrees.
- By the time hot water gets through your water pipes the temperature is approximately 115 to 117 degrees.
- Keeping your hot water heater on full blast not only wastes energy but also scalding water is harsh on the family and still doesn't meet the OSHA standard.
- To meet the standard and kill contaminating germs the water temperature must be 160 degrees Fahrenheit.

Following the OSHA laundry regulations makes your practice safer for patients and staff members.

Professional cleaners like **Dry Cleaning Direct** follow OSHA regulations because they have the proper commercial equipment washing with the correct temperature along with critical procedures that ensure your dental garments return fresh and de-contaminated of harmful germs.



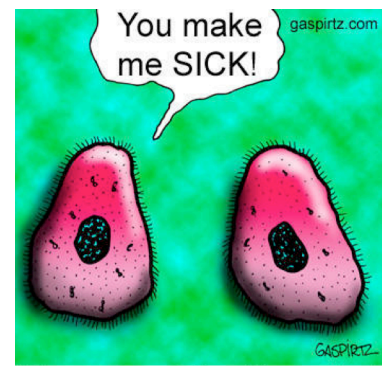
Picture this. It's the end of a long and brutal day at the dental office.

Into an already packed schedule you squeeze a couple of emergencies. One involves a bloody mess that sprays onto the doctor's smock.

No problem. Your ace assistant Janet says, "I'll take the bloody smocks home tonight and do it with rest of my laundry after I feed the kids and tuck them into bed."

As Janet leaves the office and gets into her vehicle, she throws the whole lot of scrubs and jackets into the back seat.

Arriving at school her son jumps into the vehicle and brushes his hand with a minor cut up against the dirty smocks. As they talk her son breathes in air born germs from the back seat laundry.



When germ relationships go bad