

International Hazard Datasheet on Occupation

Undertaker

What is a Hazard Datasheet on Occupation?

This datasheet is one of the international Datasheets on Occupations. It is intended for those professionally concerned with health and safety at work: occupational physicians and nurses, safety engineers, hygienists, education and information specialists, inspectors, employers' representatives, workers' representatives, safety officers and other competent persons.

This datasheet lists, in a standard format, different hazards to which undertaker may be exposed in the course of their normal work. This datasheet is a source of information rather than advice. With the knowledge of what causes injuries and diseases, it is easier to design and implement suitable measures towards prevention.

Who is a undertaker?

A worker who transports and prepares dead bodies for funeral rites and arranges for burial and cremation.

What is dangerous about this job?

- Exposed to embalming agents and disinfectants used for preparation of the deceased
- Exposed to infectious agents that may still be present in bodily fluids
- May suffer musculoskeletal ailments from handling heavy bodies, and performing repetitive tasks in body preparation
- Use needles and other sharp objects that may result in injury
- May be exposed to hearse automobile products
- May be exposed to the remains of the dead at crematories, such as ash and other combustion products
- May be exposed to medications that may have been taken by the deceased, such as chemotherapeutic agents and overdoses
- Work all hours of the day and night, and may suffer from sleep deprivation and disrupted circadian rhythms

Hazards related to this job

Accident Hazards 	Slips, trips, falls on wet, uneven flooring while transporting dead bodies	1
	Puncture or lacerations wounds from scalpels and needles used in the preparation of bodies	2 3
	Traffic accidents when driving at odd hours to collect dead bodies	4 5
	Bodily injury from falling objects such as caskets	6 7
Physical Hazards 	Use of flammable chemicals may increase the risk of fire	8 9
	Radiation exposure from nuclear medicine patients, people contaminated with radiation and those with pacemakers containing plutonium	10 11
	Electrocution from defibrillators/pacemakers that discharge after death	3 9 10 12
	Explosions from unexploded bullets in dead bodies	3 9 10 12
Chemical Hazards 	Embalming fluid may contain high levels of formaldehyde, which may cause respiratory symptoms, sensitization, and cancer at high levels	3 8 13
	Disinfectants are also used during the embalming process, which may aerosolize and produce sensitization and respiratory irritation	3 8 13
	Solvents are pumped in to the bodies of the dead, such as phenol and methanol, and in high doses may be neurotoxic with inhalation	3 8 13
	Cyanide and toxic gases that are released from dead tissues may result in disability and death	3 8 13
	Foul odors from dead bodies, chemicals, or both	3
Biological Hazards 	Human immunodeficiency virus and other viral illnesses may remain in the blood of the deceased and be a source of infection	2 3 10 14
	Bacterial infections in the blood and tissues of the deceased, such as tuberculosis, may be a source of infection	2 3 10 14
	Fungal infections in the blood and tissues of the deceased, such as coccidioidomycosis, may be a source of infection	2 3 10
	Prions in the blood and tissues of the deceased, such as the causal agent of Creutzfeldt–Jakob Disease, may be a source of infection	2 3 10
Ergonomic, Psychosocial and Organizational Factors 	Cumulative trauma disorders from repetitive movements and manual operations	6 7
	Musculoskeletal problems such as muscle strains, sprains, or acute back injury may result from long-time standing and heavy lifting	6 7
	Overexertion from heavy lifting and transporting	6 7
	Disruption of circadian rhythms and sleep deprivation	4
	Psychosocial stress of dealing with mourning families, and handling dead bodies	15

Preventive measures

1	Wear shoes that have non-skid soles to ensure proper footing and prevent slipping
2	Be cautious with sharp instruments; use safety needles when possible; store all sharp objects in a safety receptacle when not in use
3	Wear masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment to limit injury and exposures
4	Use a shift schedule to ensure that shifts follow circadian rhythms and limit sleep deprivation
5	Prepare accurate directions for travel and ensure timely car maintenance
6	Wear a back brace whenever anticipating heavy lifting; take frequent breaks; get assistance to limit injury
7	Utilize workbenches, trolleys and lifting equipment whenever possible, and ensure that they are tied down to prevent falls; ensure that workbenches are fitted to an appropriate height
8	Store flammable chemicals away in sealed containers and take out only what is needed at the moment; limit combustible products in the embalming room, e.g. no smoking
9	Have a fire extinguisher present in case of fire, and ensure that workers have regular training on how to use the fire extinguisher
10	Collect all necessary data about the deceased, such as their medical history and their exposures prior to death
11	Wear a lead apron and necessary shielding if the deceased contains radiation hazards
12	Use the right instrument for each task; use magnets to deactivate pacemakers/defibrillators; use long-handled instruments for explosives, and rubber forceps for electrical/explosive hazards
13	Use a local exhaust ventilation system to prevent high ambient concentrations of chemicals in the air of the workplace or use a respirator
14	Get vaccinated for Hepatitis B, C, tetanus and polio, and get annual tuberculosis screening
15	Provide psychosocial support and counseling, and provide classes on how to deal with grief and mourning

Specialized Information

Synonyms	Mortician; funeral director; funeral home manager
Definitions and/or description	Plans, organizes and arranges funeral services for the recently departed at the request of family. Responsible for consulting family and friends to determine the details needed for the funeral ceremony, such as casket selection, obituary arrangement, floral delivery, gravesite opening, and clergy services. May be responsible for embalming, dressing, casketing and enhancing the body for the final ceremony. Responsible for completion of death certificates and other legal documents, as well as notifying next of kin and survivors of the deceased on their eligibility for inheritance and other benefits.
Related and specific occupations	Funeral service manager; medical examiner; coroner; embalmer; gravedigger; cremation technician; forensic pathologist; grief counselor; general operations manager; social and human services assistants; registered nurses; emergency medical technicians; paramedics; police detectives; criminal investigators
Tasks	Arranging; casketing; consulting; coordinating; cutting; decorating; discussing; disinfecting; dressing; driving; embalming; enhancing; examining; injecting; lifting; measuring; memorializing; notifying; ordering; organizing; preparing; preserving; restoring; scheduling; selecting; submitting; sympathizing; transporting; writing
Primary equipment used	Gloves; aprons; safety goggles; sharp medical instruments; trochars; embalming fluids; hydraulic body lift; stretcher; operating table; changing table; mortuary cot; rollers; shackles; caskets; casket carts; casket lowering devices; casket racks and lifts; vault handling equipment; air purifiers; monument lifting equipment
Workplaces where the occupation is common	Funeral homes; Crematoriums; Churches; Temples; Cruise ships; Military zones; Morgues
References	- Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, <i>Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition</i>, Funeral Directors. Available at http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/funeral-directors.htm, Accessed 11/05/2013. - Burton JL. Health and safety at necropsy. <i>Journal of Clinical Pathology</i> (2003); 56(4): 254-260 - Coe CA. CPL 10/09 Revised local emphasis programs for reducing formaldehyde exposure. U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 10/1/2010. Available at https://www.osha.gov/dep/leps/RegionIV/ATL-West-Formaldehyde.doc, Accessed 11/01/2013. - Creely KS. Infection risks and embalming. Research Report TM/04/01. Health Protection Agency, Institute of Occupational Medicine, March 2004. Available at http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/hpawebfile/hpaweb_c/1200660063059, Accessed 11/14/2013. - Giang V. Confessions of a mortician. America Online Jobs, 2/12/2013. Available at http://jobs.aol.com/articles/2013/02/12/mortician-job-experience/, Accessed 11/15/2013. - Gressel MG, Votaw A, Hagedorn RT, et. al. Controlling formaldehyde exposures during embalming. Hazard Controls, NIOSH Publication 98-149. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 1998. Available at www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/hazardcontrol/pdfs/hc26.pdf, Accessed 11/15/2013. - National Funeral Directors Association. Formaldehyde best management practices. Embalming, 08/2010. Available at http://nfda.org/additional-tools-embalming/1749-formaldehyde-best-management-practices.html, Accessed 11/15/2013. - O*Net. Summary report for 39-4031.00: Morticians, undertakers, and funeral directors. O*Net Online. Available at http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/39-4031.00#WorkActivities, Accessed 11/10/2013. - Occupational Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Program. Occupational health and funeral homes. New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, March 1997. Available at www.nj.gov/health/surv/documents/funhome.pdf, Accessed 11/14/2013. - Surunda A. "Morticians" In: Greenberg MI, Hamilton RJ, Phillips SD, et al. (eds) <i>Occupational, Industrial and Environmental Toxicology</i>, 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Mosby, 2003, pp.274-284. - Varvaloucas E. Meditating on mortality: an interview with mortician Caitlin Doughty. <i>Tricycle</i>, 6/12/2013. Available at http://www.tricycle.com/blog/meditating-mortality-interview-mortician-caitlin-doughty, Accessed 11/14/2013. - Weeks A. Morticians talk about what's tough, and why it's almost a calling. <i>Lifestyles</i>. Magic Valley, 10/24/2011. Available at http://magicvalley.com/lifestyles/morticians-talk-about-what-s-tough-and-why-it-s/article_a10710c1-b000-5159-8d7c-278f273babff.html, Accessed 11/15/2013. - WorkSafe. Funeral directors information and checklist. Department of Commerce, Government of Western Australia, 2010. Available at www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/PDF/Infokits/Funeral_industry.pdf, Accessed 11/15/2013.