

Hospital Reduces Employee Risk Of Exposure To Hazardous Materials

ROME (June 2004)- Rome Memorial Hospital has invested in new equipment and new supplies to reduce its employees' risk of exposure to hazardous materials, announced Materials Management Director Larry Giardino, the hospital's hazard communication coordinator.

The hospital purchased a new \$157,000 sterilizer, which uses a non-toxic hydrogen peroxide formula to sterilize operating room instruments. "This major investment allowed us to eliminate our use of ethylene oxide gas (ETO), which is a known carcinogen," Giardino said.

"ETO is a dangerous chemical that required us to use alarm-based monitors to protect our staff. Staff in our plant management and central sterile receiving departments were required to have annual physicals to monitor ETO absorption in their body," he explained. "The new equipment sterilizes just as well as the ETO and is safer for our staff."

The hospital also eliminated its use of glutaraldehyde, a caustic and harmful disinfectant by switching to the safer and more effective, ortho-phthalaldehyde (OPA), Giardino said. The high-level disinfectant is used to sanitize instruments in respiratory care, endoscopy and radiology. Unlike glutaraldehyde, OPA does not require the use of ventilation hoods because its fumes do not irritate the eyes or nasal passages.

Another \$50,000 was invested in new equipment to reduce potential exposure to a caustic sterilant used in the Steris system to sterilize equipment in the operating room and endoscopy settings, Giardino noted.

To reduce the potential hazard of mercury exposure, the hospital replaced all of its mercury-based thermometer and blood pressure units throughout the hospital. "In addition, we are switching to a low-mercury vapor fluorescent light tube for our overhead lighting," Giardino noted.

"As part of the hospital's hazcom program, we conduct regular environmental rounds and discuss potential hazards in our Safety Committee meeting," Giardino said. "We are committed to reducing or eliminating materials that are potentially hazardous to our employees as technology and new products become available."

Employees receive annual hazardous materials training, which is also covered in new employee orientation. As required, the hospital provides material safety data sheets to educate employees about the proper handling of hazardous materials and the potential health risks.