

## FAQ on workplace health and safety

Biohazardous waste management has specific workplace health and safety (WHS) risks which need to be carefully managed. Here are some frequently asked questions on WHS based on the **Industry Code of Practice for Managing Biohazardous Waste (Including Clinical and Related Wastes)**, also known as the Biohazardous Waste Industry Code (BWI Code).

These FAQs give general guidance only. Biohazardous waste management is highly regulated with many measures required under law. Refer to the BWI Code and relevant regulations in your jurisdiction to understand both mandatory and recommended obligations.

### Q1. What are the main workplace risks that need to be managed when working with biohazardous waste?

The biggest workplace risks relate to injury and disease. Companies need to employ safeguards to minimise exposure to any substances that can cause disease or injury.

### Q2. How can I reduce workplace risks?

You need to assess and minimise the risks associated with coming into contact with biohazardous waste managed at your premises, including infectious agents, bioaerosols, toxic and hazardous chemicals, pharmaceuticals, sharps and cytotoxins.

You can reduce workplace risks by adopting standard precautions that require all staff to take maximum care, such as personal hygiene practices, using personal protective equipment, appropriate handling and disposal, and environmental controls.

Correct segregation and labelling of biohazardous waste at the source also help minimise risks all the way along the chain of waste management.

The way a building is built and set up also contributes to WHS, including impervious surfaces and proper ventilation controls in all areas where biohazardous wastes are handled and stored to minimise airborne dispersion of dusts and microorganisms.

### Q3. How do I assess and manage workplace risks?

You need to do risk assessments with your employees for every type of biohazardous waste handled by your business. General WHS practices include:

- developing clear communication channels
- training staff in safe work practices, including hygiene practices
- providing staff with amenities such as showers, lunchrooms and hand washing facilities, and keep them in good working order

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- having adequate and accessible first-aid facilities
- training staff to use personal protective equipment correctly
- keeping safety equipment available and in good working order at all times
- implementing safe storage and handling practices.

See *Section 12.3: Assessing and managing workplace risks* in the BWI Code for more information on managing workplace risks.

#### Q4. What responsibilities do I have as a manager?

Managers have primary responsibility for workplace health and safety under WHS legislation. Refer to *Section 12.4: Management responsibilities* in the BWI Code and the relevant WHS legislation in your jurisdiction.

#### Q5. How do I plan for emergencies?

Contingency plans need to be developed for all emergencies likely to occur as a result of handling, storing, transporting, treating and disposing of biohazardous waste. These plans should be developed in consultation with other contracted operators and relevant authorities, such as your jurisdiction's Environment Protection Authority, fire service and police department. *Section 12.5: Emergency/contingency plans* in the BWI Code outlines the steps involved in planning for emergencies.

#### Q6. How do I operate at maximum safety levels, beyond the minimum legislative requirements?

To operate at maximum safety levels, facilities need an accident and risk reduction program, which includes:

- prompt recording and reporting of all incidents
- investigating the cause
- identifying reasons for the incident
- implementing corrective actions including operator awareness and training where relevant
- revising standard operating procedures.

## About the BWI Code

The BWI Code helps anyone working with biohazardous waste to understand their responsibilities and work towards environmental best practice in the safe and cost-effective handling, transport, treatment and disposal of biohazardous waste across Australia and New Zealand.

The BWI Code is published by the Biohazard Waste Industry (BWI) division under the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association of Australia (WMRR) – the only national peak body for the \$15 bn waste and resource recovery industry.

To purchase the Code, email the WMRR national office at [info@wmrr.asn.au](mailto:info@wmrr.asn.au)

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