

For Attention and Action by:
Chief Executive of each HSS Trust
General Manager/Chief Executive of each HSS Board
Chief Executive of each Agency



HEALTH ESTATES
ESTATE POLICY

**NORTHERN
IRELAND
ADVERSE
INCIDENT
CENTRE**

TITLE:
DRY HEAT (HOT AIR) STERILIZERS

MANUFACTURER/SUPPLIER

Generic

PROBLEM

Many dry heat sterilizers do not have appropriate controls to provide assurance that sterilizing conditions have been achieved in the load. There is evidence that they are seldom maintained or are not subjected to periodic testing necessary to ensure that they are achieving sterilizing conditions consistently.

DISTRIBUTION

This notice should be brought to the attention of all who need to know or be aware of it, including those listed below, in accordance with local procedures. This will include:

- Liaison Officers
- Risk Managers
- Consultant Microbiologists
- Health & Safety Officers/Advisors
- Estates Managers
- Nurse Directors
- Sterile Services Departments
- Infection Control Staff
- Local Council Environmental Health Officers
- General Medical Practitioners
- General Dental Practitioners
- Optometrists
- Podiatrists
- Acupuncturists
- Professions Allied to Medicine
- Practice Nurses
- Nursing Homes
- Private Clinics

Boards/Trusts should ensure that if appropriate, this information is passed to all persons having the responsibility for the premises registered under "THE REGISTERED HOMES (NI) ORDER 1992.

ACTION

1. Use a Sterilization Service Department (SSD) to reprocess reusable medical devices wherever possible.
2. Take dry heat sterilizers out of use if they:
 - do not have an automatic controller, or
 - do not have door locks that prevent access to the load before a cycle is completed or if the cycle fails, or
 - are not maintained and tested weekly, quarterly and annually to verify that they are achieving sterilizing conditions.
3. Use steam sterilization in preference to dry heat.

SAFETY

NOTICE

BACKGROUND

NIAIC frequently receives reports that dry heat sterilizers are not maintained, tested or used correctly and that they are seldom equipped with the necessary interlocks to ensure that an effective cycle is always completed before the operator can gain access to the load.

The success of a dry heat sterilization process can only be assured if the sterilizer is equipped with an effective controller and is maintained appropriately and tested periodically.

This is exemplified by a report that a general practitioner had used a dry heat sterilizer for many weeks before realising that it had not been switched on and that the loads, which consisted mainly of vaginal speculae, had not been sterilized during that time. Routine testing might have revealed the problem sooner. A recorder attached to the sterilizer would also have revealed the problem.

The supplier of the sterilizer should be able to provide service, maintenance and testing either directly or through a third party. There is anecdotal evidence that dry heat sterilizers are often bought via mail order from organisations that seldom have technical back-up or maintenance provision. However, there is a number of independent contractors that should be able to provide these services

The Annex to this notice provides further information.

ENQUIRIES

Enquires to the NIAIC should quote the reference number SN(NI) 2002/04 and be addressed to:

Northern Ireland Adverse Incident Centre (NIAIC)
Health Estates
Estate Policy Directorate
Stoney Road
Dundonald
Belfast BT16 1US
Marked for the attention of Mr Brian Godfrey

Tel: 02890 523714
Fax: 02890 523900
Email: brian.godfrey@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Brian Godfrey
NIAIC Manager

HOW TO REPORT ADVERSE INCIDENTS

Adverse Incidents relating to medical devices, non-medical equipment, plant and buildings should be reported to NIAIC as soon as possible. Advice on how to report is given in Safety Notice SN (NI) 2002/01. If you are in doubt about how to report incidents, please speak to your liaison officer or contact NIAIC using the telephone number provided or visit our website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/niaic. All NIAIC Warning Notices are also available on the website.

Health Estates is an Executive Agency of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety



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