

## N E W S   R E L E A S E

News Release No.: 2015-111

Date: December 3, 2015

### **Cal/OSHA Cites Kaiser \$149,900 for Exposing Employees to Infectious Disease: Collection Box for Used Needles Frequently Overflowed**

**American Canyon**—Cal/OSHA today cited Kaiser Foundation Hospitals in Vallejo \$149,900 for exposing workers to injury and infection from used needles at the hospital’s collection box for biomedical waste. At least three custodial employees have been stuck by needles while attempting to empty the deposit box, which frequently overflowed and prevented the lid from closing properly.

All three employees have been given prophylactic medication to prevent disease or unwanted consequences. The first injury occurred in 2013 and the other two this year.

“Cal/OSHA will always issue citations in cases where employers willfully disregard employee health and safety,” said Cal/OSHA Chief Juliann Sum. “Kaiser should have had safety measures in place before employees were injured.”

[Cal/OSHA cited Kaiser](#) for five workplace safety violations of the [bloodborne pathogens standard](#), which requires employers to protect workers from coming into contact with blood or other disease-carrying body fluids. Two of the violations issued to Kaiser are classified as willful serious, as evidence shows that the employer was aware that an unsafe or hazardous condition existed and made no reasonable effort to eliminate the condition. The hazardous conditions were corrected after Cal/OSHA’s inspection.

“Hospital workers are exposed to known hazards on a daily basis, and their employers have a responsibility to recognize these hazards and protect their employees,” said Christine Baker, Director of the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). Cal/OSHA, officially known as the Division of Occupational Safety and Health, is a division of DIR.

Cal/OSHA’s American Canyon office opened the investigation in June after receiving a complaint. Kaiser members deposit their used needles through a hinged slot on the metal box, which resembles a postal mailbox. The needles fall into an inner plastic disposal box inside to contain biomedical waste. Employees transferred the contents into a larger disposal container for collection by Kaiser’s waste hauling contractor.

Cal/OSHA investigators learned that employees were instructed to clean the box using a broom and dustpan. When those tools proved inadequate, employees had to reach into the box to remove spilled waste, even though needles were often deposited without a protective cap.

Kaiser replaced the kiosk with two larger disposal units following Cal/OSHA's inspection, and now requires they be monitored every 30 minutes.

Cal/OSHA helps protect workers from health and safety hazards on the job in almost every workplace in California. [Cal/OSHA's Consultation Services Branch](#) provides free and voluntary assistance to employers and employee organizations to improve their health and safety programs. Employers should call (800) 963-9424 for assistance from Cal/OSHA Consultation Services.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints may contact DIR's Call Center in English or Spanish at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734). The California Workers' Information line at 866-924-9757 provides recorded information in English and Spanish on a variety of work-related topics. Complaints can also be filed confidentially with [Cal/OSHA district offices](#).

Members of the press may contact Erika Monterroza or Peter Melton at (510) 286-1161, and are encouraged to [subscribe to get email alerts](#) on DIR's press releases or other departmental updates.

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The [California Department of Industrial Relations](#), established in 1927, protects and improves the health, safety, and economic well-being of over 18 million wage earners, and helps their employers comply with state labor laws. DIR is housed within the [Labor & Workforce Development Agency](#). For general inquiries, contact DIR's Communications Call Center at 844-LABOR-DIR (844-522-6734) for help in locating the appropriate [division or program](#) in our department.