

Neutral Zone: Transferring Sharps Safely – Week 3

Teamwork is essential in the operating room. Therefore, all operating room staff, regardless of their position, must recognize potential hazards in the surgical environment to ensure a safe workplace for themselves, their co-workers and their patients. Establishing and implementing safety practices, such as availability and use of safer sharps devices, personal protective equipment, and the Neutral Zone technique, decrease the risk that a team member will obtain a sharps injury.

According to surgeon Mark Davis, hand-to-hand passing causes the most sharps-related injuries. Twenty-five percent of suture needles and more than 50% of scalpel blade injuries occur during the passing of these devices. **[insert quote by safety officer/OR manager showing hospital data [if available] regarding suture needle and scalpel blade injuries in the OR.]** The Neutral Zone technique can be implemented to decrease the risk of sharps injuries.

The Neutral Zone is defined as, a designated area/location where **sharps only** may be placed and retrieved. Its purpose is to reduce the incidence of percutaneous injuries and blood exposures by reducing the occurrence of hand-to-hand transfer of sharp instruments.

Several choices can be used as the Neutral Zone. Designated apparatus include: mats, trays, all or part of an instrument stand, or basins. It is important to remember that some mechanisms work better than others and that inappropriate use of the Neutral Zone can actually increase the risk of sharps injuries. The Kidney basin, a tool often designated as the Neutral Zone, should be avoided if possible. The basin has a tendency to tip, items are difficult to retrieve because of its structure, and fingers come in close proximity to the sharps device. When selecting a Neutral Zone, the chosen apparatus should be large enough to sufficiently hold the instrument, sturdy enough that it will not tip over, mobile, and conducive to the procedure being performed.

Criteria of a Neutral Zone:

- Select and designate a Neutral Zone before the first incision/injection is made
- The Neutral Zone is reserved for **sharps only**
- Only one sharps at a time should occupy the Neutral Zone
- Scrub tech. announces the sharp by name and leaves it in the Neutral Zone in a position ready for use
- The Neutral Zone may be relocated to accommodate the surgeon's needs

[Include a quote from a Surgical Tech currently using the Neutral Zone technique.]