

Mobile storage cart protection, antifatigue mat comfort, instrument engraver danger

by Ray Taurasi, Principal, Healthcare CS Solutions.



Q We are considering using open wire rack mobile storage carts in our OR to store various implants and sterile supplies. We will use clear plastic cart covers to protect the stored items. Do mobile supply carts present a greater risk for patient infection? Are there other issues or concerns we should consider prior to moving forward with our plan?

A I am unaware of any evidence that suggests that the use of mobile storage carts increases the risk of infection for patients. Such carts are widely used successfully in many facilities. When used for sterile items, you will want to select a cart that has smooth, nonabrasive shelves that will not damage the sterile packaging. For added protection, you might consider the use of shelf liners and/or container bins to hold the sterile packages safely, especially if open wire shelving is used.

If your carts are truly going to be mobile, it's best to purchase carts with a solid bottom shelf. These will prevent dust and other particulate, stirred up by wheel motion and air currents in transit, from contaminating the sterile packages. You will want to establish the items that will be stored on the carts and provide a designated location with adequate space for each item. To minimize unnecessary handling, each location should be clearly labeled and organized.

Q A few of our sterile processing workstations require long periods of standing in place. We always have had soft floor mats at these stations for employee comfort. We have a new nurse manager who had the mats removed. He claimed they served no purpose, presented a safety hazard, were a source of contamination and were a violation of standards. Do you think it is acceptable to use these floor mats in the sterile processing department?

A There is no standard that prohibits the use of antifatigue mats in the sterile processing department or other work areas. They are even used frequently in operating rooms. There have been studies that have demonstrated the advantages of the use of antifatigue mats for employee comfort.

The flooring in the sterile processing area typically consists of very hard surfaces. As you noted, the tasks performed at some workstations entail long periods of static standing. The prolonged contact of the feet and hard flooring result in great discomfort and fatigue that can affect an individual's performance and productivity. Antifatigue mats provide a softer cushion between the floor and the feet, which can counter the adverse effects of static motion of lower extremities. The design of an antifatigue mat creates a slight swaying motion of the body, which causes a slight activity of leg muscles and stimulates blood flow.

It of course is important to select a quality antifatigue mat appropriate for use in the healthcare setting. Features to consider include:

- Mat edges should be tapered to align with the floor to minimize the risk of tripping
- Mat top surface and undersurface should be skid- and slip-resistant
- Mat must be capable of frequent cleaning and disinfection
- Sterilizable mats are available
- Mat should be sized appropriately for point of use

Q I work in a small rural hospital. We have two operating rooms, but only do elective surgery two days a week. Our staff rotates to other areas as needed and we all spend time in CSP. A manager from our parent hospital 110 miles away comes by every few months to check on things. She was rather upset because she noticed some of our instrument sets are engraved for identification. She insisted we stop this practice. We don't get new instruments very often, so what she saw has been around some time. We have an electric etching vibrating tool - why shouldn't we use it?

A Many years ago when I started my first job in the OR, we used such a device to engrave a lot of our surgical instruments and other items - this was common practice in many hospitals. We didn't know any better back then. We since have learned that the engraving process damages the hard, protective, chromium oxide layer of instruments and creates an area where bacteria can grow, and rust and corrosion can occur. It is also possible that the damaged surface of the instrument could chip, leaving foreign matter in a patient. The engraving can also create sharp areas on an instrument that can cause serious harm to the patient. So, it's time you get rid of that engraver. **HPN**

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