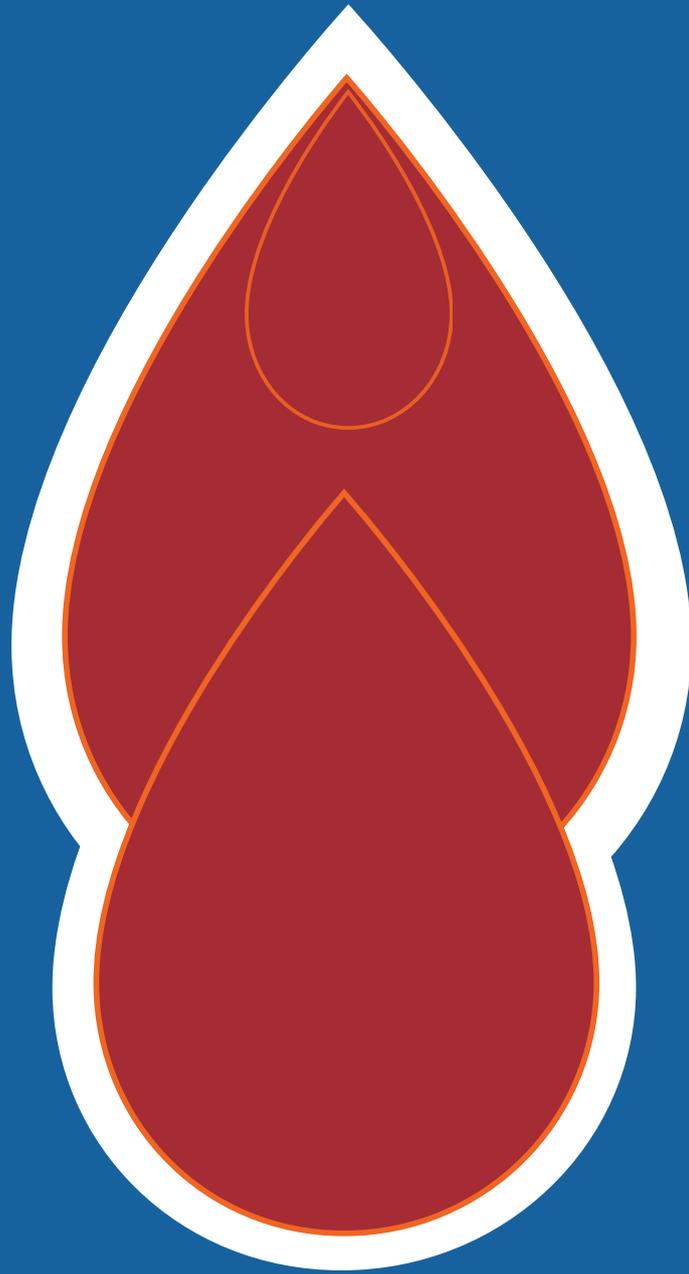


Seeing RED



Period and Menstrual Hygiene Equality Guide

An initiative by the Mentoring Women in Archaeology & Heritage group



Horror stories of periods

These are real examples given to MWAH of what people across archaeology have to deal with on a daily basis.

“Having to go on the pill even though it made me feel like shit, as I was terrified of having periods on sites.
- Cat

“The baton of friendship! Everyone on the site gets to know who's on a period because we always need emergency supplies!”- EE

“I know plenty of people who came on a period early and had to leave site due to lack of supplies as well as many cases of tampons being thrown into hedges. Those who couldn't practically use tampons suffered the most!”- LB

“During a buildings recording job I had to change a tampon behind a tree. Looking back it was unhygienic and degrading”- Ruth

“The site manager once skinned a deer in the only ladies' toilet, because it was spacious and easy to clean down! We wondered why the ladies loo smelt so strongly of bleach and now we know why!”- Emma

“I had to change a tampon in a derelict building that was in the process of being demolished because there was no accessible toilet on site. There was no door and I had to do it as quick as possible before the builders came back in. Then I had to carry the tampon around all F-ng day because there was no bin!”- Clare

“Having to wash accommodation sheets out in the sink, as they were always white, and I was scared of being charged! Plus, the cramps on site made physical work so much harder, which was not ideal when things needed to get sorted!”- Lucy

“My coping strategies generally where the heaviest tampons and a thick pad, then cross your fingers! I hope things have improved....!”
- Tess

"The UTI's from working on hot sweaty sites in summer with no local facilities. Including that one time we had to wear heavy duty boiler suits which just made the UTI's worse! Fortunately, we had a PO who was happy to drive us whenever we needed to go."- Anonymous

"There was a watching brief where we were all based out of cars, so I couldn't go to the loo for 8-9 hours. It was ok for the men as they could just wander off!"- Rebecca

"I had to change a tampon behind a farmyard wall in sleet, standing in sheep poo, due to there being no accessible toilet on my watching brief. I was still wearing gloves as it was literally too cold to remove them. I had to carry the used tampon in my pocket for the rest of the day as I couldn't discard it anywhere."
- Amy

"Having portaloos but no handwashing facilities is fairly standard. Or no bin."
- MS

"I chose to get the injection contraception, primarily because of my experience on sites with inadequate facilities. 20+ people shared a welfare van on one site, and it was horrendous!"- KS

"Nowhere to get changed on site during a period disaster, as the portaloos are always rank!"- AC

"My period was overflowing, and we were too far away from a public toilet, with no on site facilities. I was saved from disaster by another group of archaeologists who let me use the portaloos on their site!"
- Rosie

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Hygiene Guide

Current levels of hygiene

Current facilities on archaeological sites are generally poor and geared predominantly around cis men. This is leading to shortfalls in facilities available for hygiene needs, such as the avoidance of thrush, cysts, UTIs (urinary tract infections), as well as poor menstrual hygiene on sites.

There is often no running water or soap available, with toilet roll left in an unclean state leading to employees being forced to carry their own hygiene supplies with them. Many archaeological workers, especially women, on site frequently endure recurring ailments as listed above, and often end up taking more time off, especially around menstruation, leading to a gendered pay imbalance, since site facilities are not equipped to deal with further needs. There have been multiple times where due to the nature of the work, an employer has not made provision for a nearby welfare facility to be available on site, leading to further issues.

Regarding female specific toilets, there have been, and still are, multiple times reported (Source: MWAH! Facebook discussion group, comprised of cross-disciplinary women) where the female toilet has been locked on site without accessible keys, or does not contain hand soap, or even gets cleaned and emptied less regularly than the specific 'For Men' toilets. While many sites will use unisex toilets, it does appear to be a regular problem on construction sites, that despite ticking a box to have a female specific toilet, it is not maintained to the same standard. MWAH! would like to have more awareness on these sites for women to be able always access a clean, hygienic toilet. This is imperative for any menstruating individuals and those going through the menopause.



Example of poor welfare facilities

What employers can do:

- 🔴 Ensure reasonable on-site facilities, with sanitary waste disposal to be available on every site (see period guide).
- 🔴 If a key is needed to access specific toilets, to ensure that the key is kept on site where it is always easily accessible .
- 🔴 Ensure that PPE fits, and that if PPE manufacturers are unable to ensure a safe comfort and fit in female sizes, that it is acceptable if the employee so wishes, and is reasonable to do so that the employee does not have to undertake the task and will not be penalised for it.

The following is from HSE. Gov:

When selecting PPE:

-Choose equipment that suits the wearer – consider the size, fit and weight; you may need to consider the health of the wearer, e.g. if equipment is very heavy, or wearers have pre-existing health issues, standard PPE may not be suitable;

-Let users help choose it, they will be more likely to use it.

-Can it be adjusted to fit the wearer correctly?

- 🔴 That emergency sanitary care is always available. MWAH! Recommends creating a sanitary first aid kit or “period pack” which includes hand sanitiser, tissues and wet wipes provided on site for those who need them.
- 🔴 If the employer is aware of a site coming up where sanitary and hygiene facilities may be compromised, to speak to any employees who have concerns in a safe and confidential environment, and to be able to accommodate employees in alternative employment if reasonable to do so.
- 🔴 Ensure that for any away accommodation, that there are multiple drivers, and good access to sanitary and hygienic conditions while away. Taking time to check booking reviews in this instance as they can be useful in prioritising safety.
- 🔴 If an employee must take time off site, potentially at short notice to deal with a hygiene-based issue, they are not penalised for this time off. And that if an employee needs to take regular toilet or facility breaks, this is facilitated for.
- 🔴 If an employee needs to take regular time off work due to a recurring medical condition, triggered by on site facilities, reasonable adjustments are made to make sure they are not penalised.

What employees can do:

- 🔴 Keep on site management updated, regarding any health and safety concerns, including the state of the sanitary facilities.
- 🔴 Ensure that the employee is responsible for their own personal hygiene.
- 🔴 Ensure that if reasonable support is needed for a medical or menstrual condition, that the on- site supervising team are aware with as much notice as possible. If the employee wishes to keep this information private, that is also acceptable to do so.
- 🔴 Employees can ensure they take the time off to recover, and to receive medical treatment for any medical conditions that arise, with acceptable notice given to the unit.

A note on language

MWAH! Is an inclusive organisation, set up at grassroots level by women in archaeology and construction. The administration team represents women at all levels in archaeology and heritage as well as the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. MWAH! Is disability inclusive and accepts that everyone is enabled, and that not all disabilities are visible.

Language around periods and menstruation is mostly aimed at cis women, however MWAH! Accepts that it is not only cis women who menstruate. Therefore, the language used in this document is aimed at gender inclusivity.

A note from Prospect

“Prospect are the main union for archaeologists working in the UK. We are concerned that basic legal health and safety requirements are not being provided and this often has a specific impact on women working on site.”

A note from RESPECT

“The Respect campaign fully supports this initiative. Archaeologists need to know they have a clean, private area with appropriate facilities”

Sources: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/ppe.htm>
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg174.pdf>



Guide for Periods

What is a period/menstrual cycle?

“The process in a woman of discharging blood and other material from the lining of the uterus at intervals of about one lunar month from puberty until the menopause, except during pregnancy” Oxford English Dictionary

What does official health and safety say:

From the “Provision of welfare facilities during construction work” document, as issued by The Health and Safety Executive (2007) the only specific note to menstrual hygiene is under:

‘Planning’- ‘Toilets’

“Sanitary waste disposal should be provided in facilities used by female workers”.

This is the absolute minimum welfare rights a worker can demand. The above sentence does not allow for transgender inclusivity, as menstruation does not only occur in female workers.

On many sites the facilities mentioned may be at the main construction site compound, which is often not where archaeological workers are able to access immediately and as archaeological works tend to begin prior to set up of a site compound (for example geophysical surveying and archaeological trial trenching) the facilities, such as portaloos, often do not have sanitary waste disposal within them.

MWAH! Wants to work towards every work site providing sanitary waste disposal. The above sentence should be rephrased for archaeological workers as:

“Every on-site welfare used by archaeological workers should have sanitary waste disposal provided.”

This is due to the nature of menstruation, where workers often do not have time or ability to reach the designated welfare facilities with a sanitary disposal facility, when a period occurs. All periods involve a significant amount of waste, and while there are ways of ensuring a period can be eco-friendly, on archaeological sites, as there is a greater imperative for hygiene, often more tissues, wet wipes and hygiene wipes are used, as well as tampon and pad wrappers and applicators. As such having sanitary waste disposal facilities would enable easier period and menstruation waste removal.

What employers can do:

- 🔴 Ensure sanitary waste disposal within all archaeological facilities, and to promote gender inclusivity
- 🔴 Ensure time on site is given to a menstruating employee to undertake acceptable hygiene levels within facilities available and that if a site vehicle is needed at short notice to drive an employee to facilities, that they and if needs the driver are not penalised for this time.
- 🔴 Ensure menstruating employees are working within their current abilities. It may be that a menstruating employee is unable to work as fast, or have as high energy levels, so ensuring the employee is safe and able to work is priority.
- 🔴 Ensure that if a menstruating employee is due to undertake extra duties, (such as driving), that there is a backup (driver/ worker) just in case they are unable to perform the extra duties.
- 🔴 Ensure that if an employee requests time off site, that this request is met.

Ensure that the employee feels confident and without stigma to say if they are unable to attend work that day due to menstruation.

- 🔴 Ensure that if an employee does not feel comfortable speaking to their site manager/ project officer that they are still accommodated for and given reasonable allowance to privately deal with their menstruation.
- 🔴 Employees may have separate needs, such as a pre-existing medical condition, like PCOS or Endometriosis which may require additional support and needs on site. These should reasonably be accommodated for, and where extra support cannot be given, the employee should be able to request short notice time off site during this.
- 🔴 In the event of employees suffering particular conditions a personal Risk Assessment should be undertaken to enable safe working in a supportive environment.
- 🔴 That employers have free, accessible period supplies to hand in an emergency.

What to expect from employees:

- That employees will reasonably inform their site manager/ project officer if they may need menstruation support on site, with as much notice as possible.
- That the employees take charge of their own personal hygiene needs, and that if the employee needs to access any emergency supplies, as with a first aid kit, they inform their site manager/ project officer if a re-stock is needed.
- That employees will take responsibility for their extra duties, and avoid taking on extra duties, if they know they may not be able to undertake them.
- That employees will take responsibility for their abilities, and to take care as needed to avoid exhaustion.
- That employees will be responsible for their own pain management within reason. If an employee needs to take medication that could prevent them from working and carrying out their duties, it is up to the employee to inform their site manager/ project officer and to request reasonable time off. This is especially important if the employee is a designated driver or has machine monitoring duties.

What to put in a period pack:

The basic period pack should contain:

- Mixed size applicator tampons, able to be purchased from any shop. Basics range is acceptable but must have applicator for hygiene. Beware of "expiry dates". Like with first aid plasters, tampons do have expiry dates.
- Mixed size period pads. Basic range is acceptable.
- Hand sanitiser
- Hand wipes
- Tissues
- Sanitary bags

It is advisable for a period pack to be in a wipeable pvc bag, which can be cleaned after use. It is not advised for painkillers to be inside the first aid kit. Employees should be responsible for their own pain management.

MWAH! Has aimed to ensure a Period Pack or Sanitary First Aid kit can be put together for under £10 a pack, with refilling as required. This is with the aim of removing budgetary concerns for units.

A note on language

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A note from Prospect

Prospect are the main union for archaeologists working in the UK. We work to defend and protect the rights of workers and have a focus on people working in the field. As well as employers' duties under health and safety legislation, employers also have a duty to prevent workplace discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. We need to ensure that nobody feels discriminated against because of their period.

A note from RESPECT

Archaeologists on their period need to know that they have a clean, private area with appropriate facilities. The small act of providing emergency sanitary protection and sanitary bins on site sends a big signal that planning for periods should be a normal everyday part of a site set up.



“This guide was put together by the grassroots organisation “Mentoring Women in Archaeology and Heritage” (MWAH!) whose members reflect the diversity across Archaeology and Heritage based careers. This guide would not have existed if not for the support of the amazing teams at RESEPCT and PROSPECT. Special thanks for Aisling Nash for their help in the design.

Dedicated to Theresa O’Mahoney. A tireless and fearsome trailblazer for those in enabled, queer and feminist archaeology. Her work will not be forgotten.”

Logo and Guide
Design and Layout
by Aisling Nash of
Ashtree Heritage

aislingnash@gmail.com

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@mentoringwomen1