



Household Medical Sharps Management

FACT SHEET 37-034-1010

1. BACKGROUND: As the number of home health care patients rises, sharps are increasingly being mixed with household refuse and recyclables, or flushed to a sanitary sewer. Generally, sharps generated in the household consist of syringes with or without needles attached, hypodermic needles, and under certain conditions, scalpel blades and lancet type sharps. Sharps pose a potential health risk to waste collectors and workers in recycling facilities who might be accidentally stuck by them. All “needle stick” injuries require investigation and medical follow-up. They can cause long-term emotional stress and increase the risk of exposure to infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis. With proper controls in place, the sharps waste stream can be managed safely and economically.

2. HOUSEHOLD SHARPS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: Sharps waste generated in a household setting should be managed as follows:

- Place waste sharps in a rigid, puncture and leak-resistant container with a secure lid or cap. When full, the sharps container should be taped closed or tightly lidded to make re-opening difficult. Do not reopen closed, full sharps containers. Review state and local requirements prior to disposal in general trash.
- Acceptable containers include commercially-available sharps containers or heavy plastic detergent or bleach bottles with screw caps. Unacceptable containers include coffee cans (lids are too easily punctured), plastic bags, beverage cans, and bottles. **DO NOT** add bleach to the container. Bleach may not completely disinfect the sharps, and could spill or injure residents and waste handlers.
- A sharps container is considered full when two thirds to three fourths of the container is filled. There should be no possibility of sharps protruding from the top.
- Label sharps containers destined for disposal with the words “Waste Sharps”. If a recyclable container is used to dispose medical waste sharps, ensure the container is labeled “Not for Recycle” to avoid inadvertent mingling with recyclables or other wastes.
- Make sure all containers having sharps are kept out of the reach of children and pets, and are secure when not in use.
- Do not manipulate sharps by shearing, clipping, bending, recapping, or breaking needles, as this increases the risk of needle-stick injury.

3. TYPES OF SHARPS DISPOSAL PROGRAMS: As an alternative to disposing of sharps through normal household waste mechanisms, some communities have hired licensed medical waste haulers to collect sharps containers from residents, and support the use of “mail-in” sharps programs. Local municipality or state officials can be contacted to see if such programs exist.

- Residential Special Waste Pick-up Service: Sharps generated in a residential setting should be placed in a special “sharps” container, and much like a recycling container, it is set outside for pick-up by special waste handlers. The container should be secured against pests and unauthorized entry.

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- Supervised Container Collection Sites: Residential sharps users can take their full, sealed sharps containers to an appropriate collection site. These may include, doctor's offices, pharmacies, hospitals, health departments, fire stations, medical waste facilities, and household hazardous waste drop-off sites.
- In-Home Individual Disposal Products: There are many products available for "at-home" injectors, including devices that sever the needle or burn the needle, to retractable needles and authorized sharps containers.

4. ADDITIONAL INTERNET SOURCES FOR SHARPS DISPOSAL INFORMATION:

For additional information on management and disposal of used sharps, the following organizations should be contacted.

- Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal: www.safeneedledisposal.org Call 1-800-643-1643, Information on the availability of safe disposal programs in the local area.

- American Diabetes Association (1-888-342-2383), www.diabetes.org/ Search this website for "Insulin Storage and Syringe Safety Information".

- U.S. EPA, Disposal of Medical Sharps, <http://www.epa.gov/wastes/nonhaz/industrial/medical/disposal.htm>. Information on Drop Boxes, Mail-back Programs, Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP), and at-home Needle Destruction Devices.

- U.S. EPA, <http://www.epa.gov/wastes/nonhaz/industrial/medical/programs.htm>. An overview of State medical waste regulations.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/needledisposal, includes public health laws and regulations affecting community syringe disposal options.