



# Disposal Tips for Home Health Care

**You** can help prevent injury, illness, and pollution by following some simple steps when you dispose of the sharp objects and contaminated materials you use in administering health care in your home.

You should place:

- Needles
- Syringes
- Lancets
- Other sharp objects

**in a hard-plastic or metal container with a screw-on or tightly secured lid.**



Many containers found in the household will do, or you may purchase containers specifically designed for the disposal of medical waste sharps. Before discarding a container, be sure to reinforce the lid with heavy-duty tape. **Do not put sharp objects in any container you plan to recycle or return to a store, and do not use glass or clear plastic containers** (see additional information below). Finally, make sure that you keep all containers with sharp objects out of the reach of children and pets.

We also recommend that:

- Soiled bandages
- Disposable sheets
- Medical gloves

**be placed in securely fastened plastic bags before you put them in the garbage can with your other trash.**



# Preventing Injury and Pollution

## Containers with sharps are not recyclable

EPA promotes all recycling activities, and therefore encourages you to discard medical waste sharps in sturdy, nonrecyclable containers, when possible. If a recyclable container is used to dispose of medical waste sharps, make sure that you don't mix the container with other materials to be recycled. Since the sharps impair a container's recyclability, a container holding your medical waste sharps properly belongs with the regular household trash. You may even want to label the container, "**NOT FOR RECYCLING.**" In addition, make sure your sharps container is made of nonbreakable material and has a lid that can be securely closed. These steps go a long way toward protecting workers and others from possible injury. (Although disposing of recyclable containers removes them from the recycling stream, the expected impact is minimal.)

## Local Programs

Your state or community environmental programs may have other requirements or suggestions for disposing of your medical waste. You should contact them for any information you may need.



For additional copies of these disposal tips, please call the RCRA Hotline at 800 424-9346 or TDD 800 553-7672. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area, the number is 703 412-9810 or TDD 703 412-3323. The RCRA Hotline operates weekdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., eastern time.



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

November 2003  
EPA530-F-98-025C  
[www.epa.gov/osw](http://www.epa.gov/osw)

## **New Information About Disposing of Medical Sharps**

The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal, comprised of medical, government and waste association and private sector companies, is working with the Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate and promote alternative disposal methods for used needles and other medical sharps.

Improper management of discarded needles and other sharps can pose a health risk to the public and waste workers. For example, discarded needles may expose waste workers to potential needle stick injuries and potential infection when containers break open inside garbage trucks or needles are mistakenly sent to recycling facilities. Janitors and housekeepers also risk injury if loose sharps poke through plastic garbage bags. Used needles can transmit serious diseases, such as HIV and hepatitis.

The Coalition has identified several types of safe disposal programs for self-injectors. Instead of placing sharps in the trash, self-injectors are encouraged to use any of these alternative disposal methods:

- **Drop Box or Supervised Collection Sites**

Sharps users can take their own sharps containers filled with used needles to appropriate collections sites: doctors' offices, hospitals, pharmacies, health departments, or fire stations. Services are free or have a nominal fee. Check with your pharmacist or other health care provider for availability in your area.

- **Mail-back Programs**

Sharps users place their used sharps in special containers and return the container by mail to a collection site for proper disposal. This service usually requires a fee. Fees vary, depending on the size of the container. Check with your health care provider, pharmacist, yellow pages, or search the Internet using keywords “sharps mail back.”

- **Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP)**

Sharps users can safely exchange used needles for new needles. Contact the North American Syringe Exchange Network at 253-272-4857 or online at [www.nasen.org](http://www.nasen.org).

- **At-home Needle Destruction Devices**

Several manufacturers offer products that allow you to destroy used needles at home. These devices sever, burn, or melt the needle, rendering it safe for disposal. Check with your pharmacist or search the internet using keywords “sharps disposal devices.” The prices of these devices vary according to product type and manufacturer.

### **For More Information:**

- Call your local solid waste department or public health department to determine the correct disposal method for your area.
- Ask your health care provider or local pharmacist if they offer disposal, or if they know of safe disposal programs in the area.
- Contact the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal at 1-800-643-1643 Ask about the availability of safe disposal programs in your area or for information on setting up a community disposal program. Visit [www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/other/medical). This website also offers a list of all state health and solid waste/sanitation department contacts.