

July 2004

Disposal Tips for Household Generated “Sharps”

Disposing of loose needles and syringes (sharps) into household trash poses a risk to family members and solid waste workers who must handle the waste. While Ohio law allows the disposal of sharps used by an individual for purposes of their own care or treatment into the solid waste stream, it is important to recognize the hazard they pose to solid waste workers who handle waste containers without knowledge of the contents.

Sharps should be packaged to minimize opportunity for contact injury. Needles and syringes should be discarded intact after use. Needles should never be bent, broken, or manipulated by hand. If the purchase of a medical grade sharps container is too costly, there are various alternatives for safe disposal.

What are sharps?

Sharps include lancets, hypodermic needles, syringes, scalpel blades and broken glass articles (other than household items).

Who is a home sharp user?

A person who generates sharp wastes for the purpose of their own care or treatment. For example, an insulin dependent diabetic or a terminally ill person being cared for by family members at home.

What are my alternatives to a purchased sharps container?

Use a rigid, leak-proof, puncture-resistant container with a tight fitting lid. Common household containers that match this description include detergent bottles, bleach bottles, two-liter bottles, plastic juice containers and coffee cans (if the lid is securely taped to the can).

Glass containers are not recommended for use as sharps containers because the glass may break and spill the contents. Plastic milk jugs make poor sharps containers because the plastic used in these containers is thin and sharps easily poke through. In addition, milk jugs do not always have a tight fitting lid.

Label any container used to dispose of sharps with the word “SHARPS” on all sides of the container in big block letters. Labeling the container will convey the potential hazard inside to the solid waste worker or recycling facility.

What are some other disposal alternatives for sharps?

Inquire with the company or pharmacy where you purchase your medical supplies regarding disposal alternatives. Some have programs to accept sharps containers, free or for a nominal fee, which are then treated and disposed. Your local health department may also be aware of available disposal alternatives. Also, home users may have the sharps picked-up by a commercial service. Some communities offer special pick-up on designated days of the month.

Landfills may accept sharps containers directly at the landfill in an effort to reduce the number of sharps in the solid waste and the risk to the sanitation worker. Some hospitals will take sharp wastes generated by an individual for purposes of their own treatment or care.

Why is it allowable to throw sharps into the trash and not properly package them?

Infectious waste generated by an individual for the purposes of their own care or treatment at home is exempt from the infectious wastes regulations. However, it is strongly encouraged that all infectious wastes be packaged in an appropriate container and labeled to convey its potential hazard. You may contact your local solid waste hauler to ask about their policy pertaining to accepting sharps containers.

For More Information

For more information about disposal options for home user sharps, please contact your local health department, Ohio EPA district office, or Ohio EPA's Division of Solid and Infectious Waste Management **Infectious Waste Unit** at (614) 644-2621.

Ohio EPA District Offices:

Northeast District Office:
(330) 425-9171

Northwest District Office:
(419) 352-8461

Central District Office:
(614) 728-3778

Southeast District Office:
(740) 385-8501

Southwest District Office:
(513) 285-6357

