



Minnesota
Pollution
Control
Agency

Metro District,
Regular
Facilities
Section

Infectious Waste - Disposing of Household “Sharps”

Waste/Household Hazardous Waste #4.67/December 2000

Environmental Concerns

More than a billion needles are thrown out each year by diabetics who self-administer insulin. This high number of sharps in the garbage, along with a growing number of home health care patients, creates a hazard to sanitation workers. This fact sheet outlines some of the options for safely disposing of used sharps from the home.

Managing Household Sharps

Even though household sharps can legally be put into the trash, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) encourages citizens to dispose of used sharps in a specific way. These disposal methods will help protect sanitation workers at composting facilities, waste incinerators, recycling facilities, and landfills. Also, some of the local ordinances may prohibit household sharps from being disposed of with the regular household garbage.

Collection or Drop-off Options

Option One: First, see if there are any household sharps collection or drop-off sites in your area.

- Your county health department or environmental services department may know if a local collection program is available for household sharps. Residents may bring their sharps to a drop-off site after they have properly packaged and labeled

the sharps. The containers are then disposed of by the local government with the regular solid waste or hauled away by a registered infectious waste transporter.

- Ask your doctor, local clinic, hospital, fire department, or neighborhood pharmacy about programs to accept household sharps.
- Contact your waste hauler to see if it collects household sharps.

Option Two: If you can't find a collection or drop-off option, sharps may be put into your garbage. Follow these guidelines to help keep sanitation workers safe:

- Place sharps in clear, plastic containers with secure screw-on caps only, such as a soda pop bottle. A study performed in the state of Washington showed that two-liter plastic pop bottles actually withstood the solid waste disposal process and compaction better than other containers, particularly when they were filled only halfway.
- Label the container “SHARPS”.
- When a container is one-half full, tightly seal, label it, and place it with the garbage. (*Do not place these bottles in a recycling bin.*)
- Inform your garbage hauler that your trash will include a container with household sharps.





The hauler should let you know if the container should be bagged and placed with the other trash, or if it should be placed alongside or on top of the regular garbage. If you place your garbage in an area where rummaging may occur, conceal the container in a bag and place it in the rest of the garbage just prior to collection. Your hauler should be willing to work with you to arrange for the most efficient and safest way to handle household sharps.

For more information contact:

- the nearest MPCA regional office:

Brainerd	(218) 828-2492
Detroit Lakes	(218) 847-1519
Duluth	(218) 723-4660
Mankato	(507) 389-5235
Marshall	(507) 537-7146
Rochester	(507) 285-7343
St. Paul	(651) 296-6300
Toll free	(800) 657-3864
Willmar	(320) 214-3786
- your County Solid Waste Department
- Minnesota Department of Health AIDS Line
The AIDS Line answers questions about syringe access locations, syringe disposal, drug treatment programs, and HIV prevention.

Metro Area	(612) 373-AIDS or (612) 373-2465 TTY
Statewide	(800) 248-AIDS or (800) 820-2437 TTY

MPCA Website: <http://www.pca.state.mn.us>