Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection

FACT SHEET

Safe Options for Home Needle Disposal

In Kentucky, medical waste falls under the legal definition of *municipal solid waste* (household and commercial solid waste) and is subject to the same legal requirements as household garbage. As such, it may legally be disposed of with the household garbage in a permitted contained landfill.

However, medical waste can pose its own set of problems, especially for waste haulers who may inadvertently come in contact with needles or other medical waste that has not been properly managed. The Kentucky Division of Waste Management offers the following recommendations for safe disposal of sharps (needles, syringes, and lancets) used in the home:

- Use a sharps container purchased from a local pharmacy.
- Contact your local hauler to advise when you will set out the sharps container.
- If possible, set the sharps container out on the morning of pickup.
- Set the sharps container on top of bagged garbage; ensure that it is marked as a sharps container.
- Place a lid on the garbage can to prevent tampering.

Needle-stick injuries are a preventable health risk. Used sharps can injure people, spread germs, and spread diseases. The importance of using a purchased sharps container is to provide safe disposal of sharps in the home and to protect the collectors when they pick up the waste at the curbside. Do not dispose of sharps in the trash unless they are contained within a sharps container. A cheaper alternative is a hard plastic container such as an empty laundry detergent bottle. Do not flush them down the toilet.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has comprehensive information on medical waste at http://www.epa.gov/wastes/nonhaz/industrial/medical/. The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal is working with EPA to evaluate and promote alternative disposal methods for used needles and other medical sharps. Publications with safety disposal tips for patients and healthcare professionals are online at http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/inforesources/pubs/pub-m.htm.

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