

Disposing of Household Sharps

For a Healthy Environment

As the number of persons using sharps (needles, syringes and lancets) in their homes rises, so does the health risk to all workers in recycling facilities. Workers may be accidentally stuck when sharps are mixed with household garbage, recyclables or when flushed down a toilet.

All “needle stick” injuries demand expensive testing, cause long-term emotional stress and increase the risk of exposure to infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B and HIV.

To reduce such health risks, the State of Wisconsin has adopted rules effective November 1, 1994, regarding packaging, treating and disposing of sharps in healthcare settings and households.

Sharps must be packaged safely and either be incinerated in a licensed medical waste incinerator or rendered non-infectious and both broken and unable to be reused before they can be put into a landfill. Other infectious waste generated at home may be bagged and put out with the regular trash.

Packaging Steps

Follow these steps for packaging your used or discarded unused sharps:

1. Place the sharps in rigid puncture-resistant containers with secure lids or caps.

***Acceptable** containers include commercially available sharps containers or heavy plastic detergent or bleach bottles with screw caps.**

***Unacceptable** containers include coffee cans (lids are easily punctured), plastic milk jugs, plastic bags, pop cans or bottles. Do not add bleach to the container. Bleach may not completely disinfect needles and it could spill and injure you or waste handlers.*

*Aurora Pharmacy from Watertown will accept commercially available sharps containers only.

2. Visibly label the sharps container with words such as “bio-hazard.” “infectious waste,” “sharps” or with the bio-hazard emblem.

*It’s also a good idea to label detergent bottles with the words “**do not recycle**” so that they are not accidentally included with recyclables.*

3. When the puncture-resistant container is full, sealed and labeled, store it out of reach of children and dispose of it properly.

Do not put the container out with the trash or with recyclables. Instead, take it to a registered sharps collection station or make other arrangements if such stations aren’t available. Your healthcare provider can offer suggestions regarding locations for proper disposal. A list of optional disposal locations is listed on the back of this brochure.