North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Division of Waste Management
Solid Waste Section

Medical Waste Frequently Asked Questions

- **I use syringes in my home to inject insulin. How can I dispose of my used syringes?**

The medical waste rules do not prohibit anyone from disposing of used syringes by putting them in the regular trash bin or dumpster provided that the sharps are kept in a thick, hard-walled plastic container with a cap or lid. Home, office or institutional generators should always contact their local solid waste authority (may be city or county) to make sure that there are no local ordinances against this practice.

- **I'm a home health care worker, taking care of patients in their homes, and sometimes I generate some tissue and blood from wound cleaning. Is this regulated medical waste and does it need to be incinerated?**

Medical waste generated in private residences is not subject to the medical waste rules and may be disposed of as general solid waste in the regular trash. (G.S. 130A-290(17a))

- **I need to find someone to transport medical waste from my office to be taken to be treated. Do you have a list of transporters I could call?**

The Department does not keep a list of transporters. Those seeking a transporter for their medical waste should see our list of Commercial Medical Waste Treatment Providers and contact one of their offices. They may be able to put you in contact with a transporter in your area.

- **I want to start a trauma scene clean up business. What do I need to know about the medical waste rules for such a business?**

Medical waste is defined as "waste generated in the diagnosis, treatment, or immunization of humans or animals". Since the waste generated at trauma scenes does not fit the definition of medical waste, such waste is exempt from the medical waste rules.
Be aware that even though the waste is considered non-medical for the purposes of disposal, the presence of human tissue or body fluids still renders the waste biohazardous and "Universal Precautions" would still

apply.

- **What waste from a funeral home is considered medical waste?**

Typically, the only regulated medical waste from funeral homes would be blood and body fluids. Since most funeral homes are connected to a sanitary sewer, this is an appropriate disposal for this waste type. Homes not connected to a sanitary sewer would need to have a holding tank and have the tank pumped periodically with the waste being taken to a public wastewater treatment plant.

- **I would like to retain my placenta after I give birth. Do the medical waste rules allow me to do that?**

The medical waste rules do not prohibit a woman from taking possession of her placenta after a birth. Women should consult with their physicians to retain their placentas.

- **I would like to start a medical waste transport business. What would I need to know about for such a business?**

The Department is not required to license or permit generators or transporters. As such, licenses or permits are not issued. However, there are rules that govern both generators and transporters and they can be found here under sections .1204 and .1205.

- **OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Agency) considers blood soaked bandages, dressings, tubing, gowns, and other such items to be regulated medical waste but DENR rules do not. Whose rules prevail?**

The OSHA standards do not address disposal methods. OSHA Instruction CPL 2-2.44D states "that while OSHA specifies certain features of the regulated waste containers, including appropriate tagging, the ultimate disposal method (landfilling, incineration, and so forth) for medical waste falls under the purview of the state and local regulations".

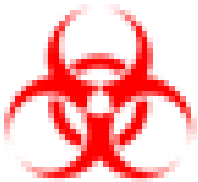
- **I have some unwanted and expired pharmaceuticals that I need to get rid of. How can I do that?**

The Solid Waste Section considers any pharmaceutical waste which is not RCRA restricted to be general solid waste and can be disposed of in the regular trash. Some counties have permanent and temporary household hazardous waste collection events where residents may bring their unwanted pharmaceuticals for disposal. However, some pharmaceutical types, such as narcotics and other Drug Enforcement Agency scheduled drugs may require special handling and disposal. It is no longer recommended that unwanted pharmaceuticals be disposed by flushing down a commode.

- **I saw some "red bags" with a biohazard symbol on the street, waiting for the garbage truck to come by and collect it. Is that allowable?**

The red bag designation with the biohazard symbol is an industry standard used to identify medical

waste in the health care workplace. It is not intended to be a designation of how or what types of medical waste are to be treated before final disposal.



The biohazard symbol designates waste that is infectious but not necessarily regulated.

- **I work at a manufacturing plant and sometimes we generate some used band aids or some bloody bandages due to minor accidents. Do the medical waste rules apply?**

Generally, the medical waste rules are meant to apply to medical facilities such as hospitals, long term care facilities, out-patient clinics, doctors' offices, dentists, veterinarians and similar health care facilities. Moreover, medical waste that requires treatment is limited to blood and body fluids in excess of 20 milliliters (excluding urine and feces), human tissues, organs and body parts, the carcasses of infected animals and cultures and stocks of infectious organisms. Since band aids and bloody bandages do not fall into these categories the waste does not require treatment. Placing the waste into a properly identified container (bag with a biohazard symbol) may still apply.

- **I work as an environmental manager at a hospital. We've been told to trim our budget and decreasing the amount we pay for medical waste disposal is a priority. Do you have any suggestions?**

Review the state's medical waste laws and rules and confirm that what is being sent for treatment is required to be treated. In many instances, medical facilities pay for and treat medical waste that is not regulated.
Also, verify that the best treatment option has been chosen for a specific waste type. For example, the best disposal method for human body fluids is treatment by a public wastewater treatment plant.
In addition, there are a number of reduce, reuse, and recycle strategies. Some strategies can be found at this link and this link.

- **I'm a dentist and I was wondering if the state's medical waste regulations consider extracted teeth to be regulated medical waste?**

Typically, pathological waste is defined as human tissues, organs, and body parts. Items such *extracted teeth*, *kidney* and *gall stones* are not considered to be pathological waste due to their being composed of mineral materials and they are not known to transmit infectious diseases. The disposition of teeth with mercury amalgams comes under the authority of the Division of Waste Management's Hazardous Waste Section.

- **I'm a veterinarian and I want to know if it is acceptable to dispose of animal body parts, principally from spaying and neutering, in the regular trash?**

  The medical waste rules allow for the disposal of animal body parts in the regular trash providing that the parts do not come from an animal infected with a disease which is transmissible to humans.

- **I work in histology lab and we have quite a few laboratory slides with fixed and stained human tissues that we want disposed. Can we just throw them in the regular trash?**

  Humans tissues affixed to slides would fall under the definition of pathological waste under 15A NCAC 13B .1201 (9), however; under "Treatment" as defined in G.S. 130A-309.26(a)(2), would apply if it can be determined that the procedures involved in the fixing and staining process would kill pathogens and render the tissues noninfectious. Regulated medical waste that has undergone treatment is then considered regular solid waste and can be disposed of according to any local ordinances which may apply. Please note that this determination would not apply to frozen or refrigerated tissues, unfixed tissue blocks or gross anatomical parts.

- **Can you advise on what to do when regulated medical waste is mixed with hazardous chemical waste?**

  Hazardous waste transport, storage and disposal rules are more stringent than those for medical waste in North Carolina. Hazardous chemical wastes pose a greater threat to human health and the environment. Therefore, the hazardous waste rules would take precedence.
  If the regulated medical waste cannot be safely separated from the chemical hazardous wastes then it is best to treat the entire load as hazardous waste.
  Whether the load is incinerated at a hazardous waste incinerator or land filled at a hazardous waste land fill, both of these methods exceed the NC medical waste requirements for disposal.