DEP ISSUE PROFILE

Household Biomedical Waste Management

issued: September, 1998 contact: (207) 287-2651

- **Background**

The Biomedical Waste Management Rules (06-096 CMR 900) became effective on January 1, 1991. The rules were developed and implemented as a result of legislation responding to public concerns about the potential public health and environmental hazards posed by biomedical waste.

These rules identify waste subject to regulation; require the registration of biomedical waste generators; and establish minimum standards for packaging, labeling, handling, storage, transportation, treatment and disposal of biomedical wastes.

These rules also exempt household generators from all but one requirement. Household generators *must* place discarded, household generated sharps in a rigid, puncture and leak resistant container. These containers may then be placed into the trash or managed as a biomedical waste. An example of a household generated "sharp" is an insulin syringe or a lancet.

Furthermore, these examples of household biomedical waste mentioned above are limited to medications which are either self-administered or administered by a family member. Biomedical waste generated in the home by home health care providers is not considered household biomedical waste. The home health care provider is considered the generator and is therefore subject to all applicable provisions of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules, including registering with the DEP as a generator of biomedical waste. Home health care providers are discussed more thoroughly in a later section.

- **What is biomedical waste?**

Biomedical waste is defined as:

- Discarded human blood, blood products and bodily fluids;
- Waste saturated with human blood, blood products or body fluids, such as sponges, surgical gloves and masks, surgical dressings, etc.;
- Pathological waste;
- Discarded sharps used in patient, animal or cadaver care, or in medical and biomedical research laboratories, including, for example, hypodermic needles, syringes, scalpel blades, suture needles, disposable razors, lancets, capillary tubes and Pasteur pipettes;

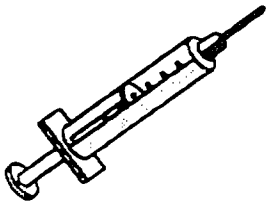
- Discarded cultures and stocks of infectious agents, the culture dishes and devices used to transfer cultures and stocks, and discarded clinical specimens and biologicals;

- Discarded carcasses, body parts, bedding and other waste discarded by research facilities from animals containing organisms or agents that are hazardous to humans; and

- Cytotoxic drugs (Antineoplastic) and chemotherapy wastes provided that the cytotoxic drugs are not identified as hazardous waste in Chapter 850 (06-096 CMR 850) of the Hazardous Waste Management Rules.

Please refer to Section 7 of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules (06-096 CMR 900.7) for a detailed description of each of the seven categories of biomedical wastes.

- **What is household biomedical waste?**



Household biomedical waste consists solely of sharps, usually generated in conjunction with the home treatment of diabetes. The sharps themselves are insulin syringes and lancets, and are either self-administered or administered by a family member (See pages 3 & 4 for information on biomedical waste generated by home health care providers).

- **What are the minimum requirements under the Biomedical Waste Management Rules for household generators?**

Household generators are required to place discarded syringes and lancets in rigid containers that are resistant to leaks and punctures. Preferred containers are made of heavy plastic and have screw-on caps, such as liquid laundry soap bottles. Glass bottles and plastic milk containers are not satisfactory because they are either easily broken or easily punctured by the needle.

Once these containers are full they may be placed in the trash or managed according to one of the other options identified below. The Department does not recommend any labeling unless there is a chance that the waste may be sorted for recyclables, in which case the container should be labeled with **"Do Not Recycle."** These containers should never be commingled with recyclable wastes.

Note: Never throw loose syringes or other sharps into wastebaskets. Too many solid waste handlers receive needle sticks each year in Maine because of this irresponsible behavior. Needle sticks cause extreme anxiety for these people, who must undergo post exposure medical testing and counseling to address the possibility of contracting a contagious disease. It is also a violation of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules.

- **May I break or clip the needle from the syringe?**

No. This technique has no advantages since you are still left with a hub at the syringe base capable of causing a puncture wound. Do not bend them either. A syringe with a bent needle is still a sharp, and the chances of getting stuck while bending a needle is high. Employees that handle needles are prohibited from doing either of these activities by OSHA.

- **Are there other disposal options for household biomedical waste?**

Yes. Many hospitals, particularly in the more rural parts of Maine, will accept biomedical waste from other generators (sometimes for a small fee) and incorporate it into their own biomedical waste stream. Contact the housekeeping department of your local hospital to see if they provide this service, or call the DEP for further information.

You may also contract with a DEP licensed biomedical waste transporter to pick up your biomedical waste at your home. Contact the DEP for a list of licensed companies and be aware that these licensed companies charge a fee for this service.

Maine law also allows discarded sharps to be mailed via the United States Postal Service (USPS) to properly permitted treatment or disposal sites. The process is as follows: A generator purchases a USPS approved package containing the sharps container and packaging materials. The generator uses the container to dispose of sharps. Once the container is full, it is mailed to the treatment or disposal site. The treatment or disposal cost and postage is usually included in the initial purchase price of the package. Biomedical transport and disposal companies market these kits.

- **My local hospital has agreed to take my insulin syringes. How should I transport my household biomedical waste to them?**

The Department recommends placing the sharps container into another sturdy container with a removable lid, such as a plastic pail, and placing it in a secure area of your vehicle, such as the trunk. This may seem like an unnecessary step but the secondary containment provided by the pail will prevent the contents of the container from spilling in the trunk.

- **Can my municipality prohibit me from disposing of my household biomedical waste at my local landfill or transfer station?**

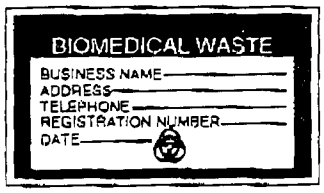
Yes. Maine law only requires municipalities to provide residents with disposal services for solid wastes. Discarded household sharps are not, by legal definition, a solid waste – they are a biomedical waste. A few towns prohibit the disposal of household biomedical waste at their solid waste facilities. Your municipal office can inform you of any local ordinance prohibiting the disposal of household biomedical waste at your solid waste facility. If your town does have this type of ordinance, you may call the DEP for assistance with other options.

- **I am a home health care provider – what do I need to do to be in compliance with the Biomedical Waste Management Rules?**

As a home health care provider generating biomedical waste you must:

(1) Register all of your offices with the DEP as generators of biomedical wastes;

(2) Label all packages of biomedical waste generated by your facility. Each package/container of medical waste must show: your business's name, address, telephone number, your DEP registration number and the package date (See Section 12B of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules for complete labeling instructions);



(3) Determine how many pounds of biomedical waste you are generating on a monthly basis. You can determine the amount you generate by considering all seven categories described in the definition of biomedical waste. If the amount of biomedical waste you generate in one month is less than fifty pounds, then discarded sharps, infectious stocks and cultures, and discarded clinical specimens, such as blood vials, are all you will be required to manage as biomedical waste. If the amount you generate in one month is more than fifty pounds, then you are subject to all requirements of the rules;

Remember: In calculating the amount of waste generated you must add the waste from all of your clients to arrive at the total amount of biomedical waste generated for each one of your offices. For example, if you have two office locations and one office generates 75 pounds per month and the other generates 40 pounds per month then the office with 75 pounds is subject to the entire rule and the office with 40 pounds can exercise the exemption.

(4) Once you have determined what you are required to manage as biomedical waste, you will need to safely transport the biomedical waste back to your office for management;

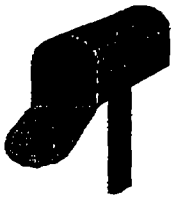
(5) Use a DEP licensed biomedical waste transporter and a four-part manifest if transporting amounts of 50 pounds or more of biomedical waste. If transporting less than 50 pounds, a manifest is not required, but it is recommended that you maintain a record of the date and volume of any and all biomedical waste shipments you make;

(6) Properly identify and segregate biomedical waste – this is accomplished by color coding the waste bags. **Under no circumstances should you place a red biohazard bag into the regular trash – even if it is first placed into a bag of another color.** Both actions are violations of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules; and

(7) Prepare a written biomedical waste management plan in accordance with Section 11B of the Biomedical Waste Management Rules.

Note: Any of your employees who has the potential for exposure to bloodborne pathogens are also subject to the protections offered in the Occupational Health and Safety Administration's (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogen Standard (29 CFR 1910.1030).

- **Where can I get my questions answered or more information?**

For more information on the Biomedical Waste Management Rules, or for the answers to specific questions, please contact:

Department of Environmental Protection
Bureau of Remediation and Waste Management
Division of Oil & Hazardous Waste Facilities Regulation
17 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0017
Attention: Biomedical Waste Program