



## Medical Waste in Dental Clinics & Offices

### Types of Medical Wastes

**Generators of medical waste in San Francisco must file an application with the SF Department of Public Health. Call HMUPA at 252-3900 for details.**

Regulated medical waste commonly generated in dental clinics and offices consists of the following:

### Biohazardous Waste

- *Human surgery specimens or tissues removed during surgery*, may be contagious to humans due to contamination by infectious agents. Exception: Extracted human teeth with amalgam restorations must be disinfected, properly stored, and either collected for mercury recycling or disposed of as hazardous waste.
- *Blood-soaked waste* which at the point of transport from the generator's site, at the point of disposal, or thereafter, contains recognizable fluid blood, fluid blood products, containers or equipment containing blood that is fluid known to be infected with diseases that are highly communicable to humans. This includes items that drip blood when compressed or flake dried blood when shaken, for example, dressing, gauze or cotton rolls and containers or equipment containing fluid blood.
- *Pharmaceutical wastes*: wastes that are prescribed or over-the-counter drugs.

### Sharps

Any device having acute rigid corners, edges, or protuberances capable of cutting or piercing, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

- Hypodermic needles, hypodermic needles with syringes, blades, needles with attached tubing, syringes contaminated with biohazardous waste, acupuncture needles, and root canal files.
- Broken glass items, such as Pasteur pipettes and blood vials contaminated with biohazardous waste.

### Disposal of Medical Waste

**Medical waste, other than sharps (needles), pharmaceuticals or fluid/liquid blood:**

- *Storage* - Medical waste must be placed in a "Biohazard bag". A biohazard bag is a disposable red bag that is impervious to moisture and is strong enough to avoid ripping, tearing, or bursting under normal use. The red bag must be labeled with the word "BIOHAZARD" or with the international biohazard symbol. The red bag must be placed for storage, handling or transport in a rigid leak-proof container with a tightly fitting lid. The container must also be in good condition and must be labeled with the word "BIOHAZARD".
- *Disposal* - Medical waste must be collected from the office every 7 days if the facility generates 20 pounds or more per month OR every 30 days if the facility generates less than 20 pounds per month. All medical waste must be taken to a permitted medical waste treatment facility or a pre-treatment consolidation point, and must be transported by a registered hazardous waste hauler.



**For more information please visit [SFEnvironment.com](http://SFEnvironment.com) or call (415) 355-3700.**

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## Sharps (e.g. needles, root canal files)

- **Storage** – Sharps must be placed in a rigid puncture resistant container. When sealed the sharps container must be leak resistant and cannot be opened without great difficulty. Sharps containers can be labeled with the words "SHARPS WASTE" or "BIOHAZARD." It is recommended that the containers be maintained in an upright position.
- **Disposal** - Containers must be replaced routinely and not overfilled (fill to 75% of capacity). The frequency by which sharps containers must be disposed of depends on the total amount of medical wastes generated by the office. If the office generates more than 20 total pounds of medical wastes per month, the sharps containers (along with the other medical wastes) must be picked up from the office within 7 days of closing the container. If the office generates less than 20 pounds of medical wastes, the sharps containers (along with the other medical wastes) must be picked up within 30 days (a month) of closing the container.
- Sharps must be transported by a registered hazardous waste hauler to a permitted medical waste treatment facility or pre-treatment consolidation point unless your office is permitted or registered to treat the sharps waste on site. The State of California, Department of Health Services (CA-DHS) has authorized services for mail-back programs for sharps (for more information call the Medical Waste Management Program at (916) 449-5671 or visit [www.dhs.ca.gov](http://www.dhs.ca.gov))
- Disinfection of needles followed by encasement in dental stone is not legal in California.
- **In San Francisco, please contact HMUPA at (415) 252-3900 for more information about proper disposal of sharps.**
- Some facilities may have a sharps collection program already established, check with the building manager about this service.



## Outdated drugs/pharmaceutical waste

- **Storage** – Pharmaceuticals must be segregated for storage and placed in a container labeled with the words, "INCINERATION ONLY" or other labels approved by the CA-DHS. The label must be placed on the lid and sides of the container.
- **Disposal** - If your dental office generated less than 10 pounds of pharmaceutical waste, you may store the pharmaceutical wastes on site for up to one year. Offices that generate more than 10 pounds per calendar year must properly dispose of the pharmaceutical wastes within 90 days. Longer storage times require prior written approval from HMUPA. Call HMUPA at (415) 252-3900 for more information.
- Your medical waste hauler should be able to properly haul and dispose of the pharmaceutical waste. In addition, check with your vendors to find out if manufacturers have "take-back" programs for expired pharmaceuticals.
- For complete information regarding medical waste requirements, see the San Francisco Medical Waste Generator Health Code 25 ([www.sfgov.org](http://www.sfgov.org) under Municipal codes, Health Code Article 25) or the California Medical Waste Management Act, online at: [http://www.dhs.ca.gov/org/ps/ddwem/environmental/Med\\_Waste/LawRegs/default.htm](http://www.dhs.ca.gov/org/ps/ddwem/environmental/Med_Waste/LawRegs/default.htm)

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## Medical/Biohazard Waste Haulers

Some haulers that accept biohazard or medical wastes from businesses include:

- Stericycle/BFI  
Rancho Cordova & San Leandro - 800-953-9324
- PWN Environmental  
Sunnyvale – (800) 541-4115
- Morgan Environmental  
Oakland - 510-267-0134
- All Chemical Disposal  
San Jose - 408 363-1660

**Note:** The products and companies listed in this document are for your convenience. Inclusion does not imply an endorsement from the City and County of San Francisco, and the list may not represent a complete list of products or companies providing these services. Also, the information above is likely to change, please visit [www.sfenvironment.org](http://www.sfenvironment.org) for updated information on waste haulers.

## Opportunities for Medical Waste Pollution Prevention

Segregation of waste is essential for public health and safety. It is also an essential process for preventing pollution and cutting costs. In general, disposal of biohazardous waste is more expensive than disposing of solid waste since it requires special treatment, like autoclaving prior to landfill disposal or transportation out of California for incineration. *Therefore, what does not belong in a biohazardous waste container becomes as important as what does belong.*

The following items are not categorized as medical waste and can legally be recycled or placed in trash cans:

- All non-bloody or merely blood-tainted wastes (as distinguished from blood soaked)
- Disposable gloves
- Paper towels
- Paper products and Packaging
- Garbage (anything potentially recyclable should not be disposed)

**Note:** Hazardous waste and radioactive waste must not be disposed of in Red Bags because incineration of these materials is highly toxic to public health.

By carefully segregating waste your dental office will:

**Save money:** Hazardous waste haulers and medical waste treatment facilities charge by volume. The less unnecessary bulk caused by throwing packaging, paper, cans, and other garbage into red bag waste containers, the less you will pay for the medical waste disposal.

**Prevent Pollution:** Medical waste in California is either autoclaved and disposed of as solid waste or it may be incinerated (generally after being shipped to an out-of-state facility). If the medical waste is incinerated, and there are chlorinated items such as disposable vinyl exam gloves unnecessarily disposed of in biohazardous waste containers, they are burned with the medical waste. This causes the release of dioxins, which are toxic byproducts of incinerating chlorinated materials. Dioxins are known to cause cancer in humans and animals. By keeping unnecessary plastic waste out of biohazardous waste containers, this public health threat can be reduced.