



WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Solid Waste Program – Recommendations for Disposal of Residential Sharps

509 Girard Street

Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: (360) 676-6724 Fax: (360) 676-6771

www.whatcomcounty.us/health - Environmentalhealth@whatcomcounty.us

When disposed of improperly, discarded sharps pose a health risk to the public; particularly solid waste workers who may suffer a needlestick injury. Needlestick injuries increase the risk of exposure to infectious bloodborne diseases such as Hepatitis B & C and HIV from contaminated needles and may require expensive testing.

Whatcom County Solid Waste Rules currently allow the disposal of residential sharps into household garbage cans when the sharps are properly packaged and labeled. Residential sharps are hypodermic needles, syringes with needles attached, scalpel blades, and lancets that are generated from self-treatment.

To minimize the risk of a needlestick injury, follow one of the following recommendations for the proper disposal of residential sharps should be followed:

- A.** With a permanent marker, label an empty PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic two-liter bottle with the warning: DO NOT RECYCLE: CONTAINS USED SYRINGES or print and affix a warning label ([here](#)). Place used syringes in the bottle. When the bottle is full, screw the cap on and seal it with tape. Dispose of the filled, sealed bottle in your household garbage.
 - DO NOT place the bottle in your recycling bin. Sharps are not recyclable.
 - DO NOT add bleach to the container. Bleach may not completely disinfect the needles and it could spill and injure you or solid waste workers.
- B.** Clip the needle points using a 'needle clipper' that contains the needle portion of the syringe inside the clipping device. The clipped syringe can go into household garbage as well as the needle clipper when it is full. Be sure to clip the entire needle portion of the syringe. Needle clippers can be purchased at some local pharmacies.
- C.** Use a mail-away sharps disposal program. Approved United States Postal Service sharps containers can be purchased from some medical waste disposal companies. When you purchase the container you are also paying for the disposal of the full container when you are ready to return it. Simply fill the sharps container and mail it back in the box provided.