



County of San Diego

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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MEDICAL WASTE DISPOSAL FOR DENTAL PRACTICES

Medical waste is regulated under the California Health and Safety Code Sections 117600 – 118360, also known as the Medical Waste Management Act (MWMA), and the San Diego County Code. Medical waste generated in a typical dental practice is, in almost all cases, limited to used needles (*sharps*). Most general dental offices generate *medical solid waste* and some offices may also generate *biohazardous waste*. Other regulated wastes, such as spent or expired chemicals, may be classified as *hazardous waste*, which is not considered medical waste. Additionally, universal wastes such as amalgam may also be generated.

What type of waste generated at a dental practice is regulated as medical waste?

Any waste meeting the definition of a medical waste as stated in the Medical Waste Management Act. This includes *sharps waste*, *biohazardous waste* and *pharmaceutical waste*.

What are sharps?

Sharps are devices with acute rigid corners, edges, or protuberances capable of cutting or piercing, including, but not limited to, hypodermic needles, hypodermic needles with syringes, blades, needles with attached tubing, acupuncture needles, root canal files, broken glass items used in health care such as Pasteur pipettes and blood vials contaminated with biohazardous waste, and any item capable of cutting or piercing from trauma scene waste. The California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) may consider orthodontic wires to be sharps waste. However, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and County of San Diego do not regulate orthodontic wires as sharps waste.

[Health and Safety Code Section 117690\(b\)\(4\)](#)

What waste from a dental practice is biohazardous waste?

Biohazardous waste includes waste which contains recognizable fluid blood, containers or equipment containing fluid blood and bacterial cultures that are not normally generated in a general dental practice.

[Health and Safety Code Section 117690\(b\)\(1\)](#)

What are the pharmaceutical waste handling requirements?

Information about pharmaceutical waste can be found at the County of San Diego website:

http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/deh/hazmat/med_waste/hmd_pharmwaste.html

How should a dental practice dispose of regulated medical waste?

There are several options for disposal of *sharps waste*:

- Disposal through a registered medical waste hauler,
- Mail-in sharps disposal (sharps only)
- Use of an alternative treatment technology approved by the California Department of Health Services, such as encapsulation (this technology is approved for *sharps waste* only).
- Treatment onsite by a steam autoclave prior to disposal as medical solid waste,

Approved alternative technologies are listed on the California Department of Public Health website:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/medicalwaste/Pages/default.aspx>

More information on *Medical Solid Waste* and *Hazardous Waste* is available at the County of San Diego website. Visit <http://www.sdcdeh.org> and look at the Medical Waste page under “waste.”

DENTAL WASTE DISPOSAL GUIDE

This diagram is intended as a disposal guide for some types of regulated waste.

It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive list of all regulated wastes.

Regulated Medical (Sharps) Waste

Needles, blades, endodontic files, root canal files.

- Sharps container disposed of via a registered medical waste hauler.
- Mail back sharps.
- Alternate treatment technology (e.g., encapsulation).
- Sharps container treated by steam autoclave.



Regulated Medical (Biohazardous) Waste

Fluid blood in IV tubing, infectious tissues, cultures.

- Red biohazard bag, stored inside a rigid container, treated by steam autoclave.
- Red biohazard bag, stored inside a rigid container, disposed of via a registered medical waste hauler.



Regulated Medical (Biohazardous) Liquid Waste

Body fluids and liquid blood.

- Sanitary sewer system.



Medical Solid Waste

Waste of apparent medical origin that is not regulated medical waste, such as dressings with non-liquid blood.

- Regular trash disposed in a secured dumpster or trash enclosure.

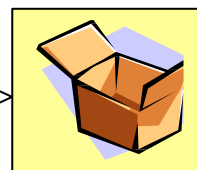


Hazardous Waste

Iodine, lead, most cold sterilant solutions, isopropyl alcohols, cleaners that are corrosive, (with a pH \geq 12.5 or \leq 2.0).

Lead foil, sludge from silver recovery unit (waste resulting from treating X-ray fixer onsite), dental amalgam, teeth with amalgam.

- Container with a hazardous waste label, a tight fitting lid and removed off site under a manifest by a registered hazardous waste hauler.
- Store in an appropriate container and maintain records that indicate that the waste is managed by a legitimate recycler.
- If not recycled, these wastes must be stored, labeled, and disposed of as a hazardous waste, as described above.



For additional information about medical and hazardous waste contact the Hazardous Materials Duty Desk at (858) 505-6880 or visit HMD's website at <http://www.sdcdeh.org>