



California
Department of
Health Services

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Director

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Services



ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER
Governor

April 20, 2004

AFL #04-09

TO: ALL GENERAL ACUTE CARE HOSPITALS

SUBJECT: USE OF REUSABLE SHARPS CONTAINERS

Several hospitals have requested information regarding the use of reusable sharps containers. We have consulted with the Department of Health Services (DHS) Medical Waste Management Program (MWMP) and have learned that they have approved companies for processing the reusable sharps containers.

The process for handling reusable sharps containers requires the containers to be taken to an approved medical waste transfer station or off-site treatment facility for processing. The process consists of the sharps containers being opened by a robotic mechanism or other practice approved by the DHS-MWMP, the contents emptied for processing as medical waste and the reusable sharps container being washed and sanitized before being sent back to the hospital for use. Reusable sharps containers can significantly reduce the medical waste stream by removing the weight of the single-use container. A study showed that a 250-bed hospital would reduce its medical waste stream by 13 tons per year from just the weight of the single-use containers. The removal of these plastics from the medical waste stream allows the hospital to implement an ideal pollution prevention intervention.

Hospitals which want to reduce the amount of plastic in the medical waste stream may do so through the use of reusable sharps containers provided the following are met:

- The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) must approve sharps containers as medical devices. This approval requirement applies to reusable sharps containers as well as single-use containers.

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- The DHS-MWMP within the Environmental Management Branch must approve the handling and treatment process being used by the companies, which already have FDA approval, for processing the reusable sharps container program.

It is our understanding that hospitals are aware of which companies have FDA approval for reusable sharps containers and DHS-MWMP's approval of their handling and treatment process, but if you need that information or have other questions, please contact the Environmental Management Branch at (916) 449-5671 or see www.dhs.ca.gov/medicalwaste for that information.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

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