

**POLICY GUIDANCE
FOR HANDLING RADIOACTIVE MEDICAL WASTE
AT OFF-SITE TREATMENT FACILITIES**

May 13, 2010

Off-site medical waste treatment facilities are required to monitor medical waste for radioactivity prior to treatment as part of their operational plans. The Department is issuing this revised guidance that shall be followed for worker and public health protection at off-site medical waste treatment facilities. This new guidance supercedes that issued by the Department on March 16, 2006. The following constitutes the revised policy guidance.

1. Set the radiation detection equipment to alarm at a level of three times (3X) background.
2. On the days when medical waste is received at the facility, test the radiation equipment with a known radiation source and take action as necessary to ensure that the alarm is operating when a radiation level of three times background is reached. If a movable radiation detector is used to scan the medical waste containers for radiation, the scanning should be done within six inches from the sides of the container.
3. An area away from workers shall be maintained for the isolation of medical waste that has caused the radiation detection equipment to alarm.
4. **Any container of medical waste that causes the radiation detection equipment to alarm must be given special handling considerations.** If the medical waste reads **greater than** three times the background level, **but less than** 1,000 micro R per hour or equivalent, the treatment facility shall immediately set the waste aside in the isolation area for 48 hours, and then re-scan it for radiation activity. If the re-scan indicates that the radioactivity has decayed to a level of three times background or less, the medical waste can be treated. If the readings continue to be above three times background after 48 hours, the Radiologic Health Branch **and** the Medical Waste Management Program of the California Department of Public Health shall be notified and further directions will be provided, including the possibility of holding the waste for further decay.
5. If a container of medical waste reads equal to or greater than 1,000 micro R per hour or equivalent, the treatment facility shall immediately set the waste aside in the isolation area. The generator, Radiologic Health Branch, and the Medical Waste Management Program of the California Department of Public Health shall be notified immediately and further instructions will be provided.

This revised policy guidance is being issued in an effort to ensure that both the Radiologic Health Branch and the Medical Waste Management Program are properly notified for radiation alarm incidents at off-site treatment facilities. The Radiologic Health Branch has assisted in revising this policy guidance and concurs with it. The phone numbers for notifying the Radiologic Health Branch and the Medical Waste Management Program are as follows:

Radiologic Health Branch
Contact Mr. Victor Anderson (916) 440-7931

Medical Waste Management Program
Contact Ms. Alison Dabney (916) 449-5692

Should you have any questions regarding this revised policy guidance, please contact me at (916) 449-5692 or via email at alison.dabney@cdph.ca.gov.

Alison Dabney, Chief
Medical Waste Management Program