

Sharps Collection: Examples and Publicity

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If you would like to collect sharps as a public service, this fact sheet provides practical insights into how a wide variety of sharps collection stations and programs operate, how much they cost and collect, and how to encourage the public to dispose of sharps properly. It includes:

- [examples of sharps collection programs](#),
- [suggestions for publicity](#) and
- a [sample press release](#).

A companion fact sheet, [Sharps Collection: Requirements for Collectors](#) (Publication WA807, available at <http://dnr.wi.gov/publications/>), explains how to set up and operate a sharps collection station.

Examples of Sharps Collection Programs

Wisconsin has a wide variety of sharps collection programs, from individual stations to large networks of stations. If you are setting up a program, their experiences may help you improve your collection program, even if the context differs from yours.

Pharmacy

This independent pharmacy is the only registered sharps collection station in a small town. The pharmacist accepts any sharps container that meets the DNR standards. Every three months, he checks the total weight. If he has collected less than 50 pounds, he transports the sharps to the nearest treatment facility in the trunk of his car. Otherwise, he calls the treatment facility to pick up the sharps.

Diabetic support group

A diabetic support group collects sharps from its members. The medical facility in which the group meets assumes responsibility for operating this station. The station is open during the group's regular meetings. A \$10 fee covers the cost of a gallon-sized container and disposal.

Rural Village

This station is located in the village's municipal building. People provide their own containers and proof of village residence. The village accepts donations to cover disposal costs.

Rural health care provider

Two affiliated hospitals have both registered as sharps collection stations. They collect sharps from individuals and businesses free of charge at their Emergency Departments, which are open at all hours. Users are given free containers in exchange for full ones. A label on the container tells where to return the full container. The hospitals will accept other containers the first time, and has stickers available for labeling them "bio-hazardous" if necessary.

The hospitals donate the containers and disposal. By donating the containers, the hospitals avoid the internal costs associated with selling them. The incentive of free containers also reduces the likelihood of sharps being left outside the door, on hospital grounds or in hospital waste containers. The hospitals intend to begin tracking the quantities and costs in 2014.

For more information, contact Howard Young Medical Center, P.O. Box 470, Woodruff, WI 54568, phone: (715) 356-8012 or Eagle River Memorial Hospital, 201 Hospital Road, Eagle River, WI 54521, phone: (715) 479-7411.

Mobile needle exchange program

A non-profit AIDS organization operates a mobile needle exchange program, known as LifePoint, using vans that visit various Wisconsin cities. Clients are given a sterile syringe for every used one they bring in. Small sharps containers are given to regular clients. Clients may also bring syringes in other rigid containers. Clients place their sharps into an oversized (8-gallon) sharps container themselves to minimize exposure to staff.

This program collects 2.5 million needles annually. No government funds are used to support this program. It works because 1) the program offers free syringes, other drug supplies (e.g., alcohol wipes, filters) and simple medical care to clients, and 2) Wisconsin law allows the exchange program and its clients to possess syringes.

For more information, contact Scott Stokes, Director of Prevention Services, AIDS Resource Center, 820 N. Plankinton, Milwaukee, WI 53202. (414) 273-1991 <http://www.arcw.org/>

Reverse distribution program

A sharps container distributor proposed to set up a reverse distribution system for sharps containers, whereby wholesale pharmacy suppliers would deliver empty containers to pharmacies and carry full containers on the back haul. However, when it came time to commit to the program, the wholesalers chose not to participate because it would not benefit them.

The sharps container distributor now sells cases of sharps containers directly to pharmacies, and the pharmacies sell them at a price that covers the 2.5-quart container and disposal. When the pharmacies have a case of full sharps containers, they call the distributor, who in turn calls a courier licensed to haul infectious waste, to deliver the sharps to an infectious waste treatment facility.

This program is convenient for the pharmacies and cost-effective for the distributor. It fills a niche for people who don't mind paying for the service if it will help the environment. The distributor, who operates in several states, has found that the best programs involve mandatory segregation and eliminate all cost to the user.

City of West Allis (population 61,000)

Started by the City, a hospital, area pharmacies and a recycling firm, this program has been operating since 1995. It succeeded because the partners were committed to strong common goals, they were well-organized, and they set a firm target date for implementation.

To kick off the program, the City produced a 7-minute video showing well-known local citizens ("champions") promoting the idea. The video aired periodically on cable TV to show residents how to participate and also to medical personnel to help them educate their patients.

During the first 9 months, the hospital received about 650 lb. of sharps and the pharmacies received a collective total of 210 lb. The hospital still receives most of the sharps collected.

While the program initially provided containers at cost to residents, residents must now provide their own containers. Commercial containers can be taken to any of three locations, while any other containers must be marked with a special sticker and taken to the hospital.

The program paid for itself with the first avoided needlestick injury among waste handlers employed by the City. In 1994, city workers experienced 3 needlesticks, which together cost three times as the sharps collection program cost during its first year. The City also noticed an immediate drop in the number of needles in the trash and in recycling containers, and there were no needlestick injuries for many years after the program started.

For more information about the program, contact the West Allis Department of Public Works (414) 302-8831 or see the website at <http://www.westalliswi.gov/faq.aspx?TID=16>. Regarding the sticker, contact the West Allis Health Department at (414) 302-8600 or Aurora West Allis Medical Center Environmental Services at (414) 328-7290.

Pierce County (population 41,000)

In this relatively rural county, a hospital, a local health department and a few pharmacies distribute sharps containers and the hospital and public health department collect them. Public health and home care nurses are available to transport sharps for home-bound patients. While the program is not intended for small businesses or farmers, the Health Department is willing to help these sharps generators find disposal options.

The program was previously funded primarily through the Health Department and a few non-profit organization donations. Since 2012, the County Sheriff's, Solid Waste, and Public Health Departments have funded it, at approximately \$3,500 /yr for containers and disposal.

Continuous public education has helped decrease the incidents of improper disposal. The Health, Sherriff's, and Solid Waste Departments educate individual residents, dispense education brochures regarding proper sharps disposal with each container distributed, and issue periodic press releases to area media.

For more information, contact: Kelsi Winter, PHN, Pierce County Health Department, P.O. Box 238, 412 W Kinne St., Ellsworth, WI 54011. 715-273-6755 kelsi.winter@co.pierce.wi.us
http://www.co.pierce.wi.us/Public%20Health/Injury_Prevention.html under the Sharps Disposal Program tab.

Jefferson County (population 84,000)

The Jefferson County Health Department serves county residents as a “drop-off site” for household sharps and assumes the cost of disposal. Businesses must provide their own medical waste disposal.

Other collection points are well-distributed throughout the county and include clinics, a city public works department, a city health department and the county recycling center. (Two pharmacies also collect sharps independent of the program.) Public education on sharps collection and disposal has been by word-of-mouth, brochures and media.

A local ordinance establishes fines for needles in trash or in recyclables.

Users who bring sharps in non-commercial containers now must place their containers in the shipping box themselves because a needle poking through an overstuffed thick-walled detergent bottle once stuck a station operator.

For more information, contact: Shirley at the Jefferson County Health Department, N3995 Annex Road, Jefferson, WI 53549. 920-674-7275 shirleyg@jeffersoncountywi.gov

Columbia County (population 57,000)

Years before the state formally allowed sharps collection, the Columbia County Solid Waste Department invited all pharmacies in the county to help set up a sharps collection program. Currently, all 11 pharmacies participate in the program.

The County's medical waste vendor delivers sharps containers and shipping boxes to the pharmacies. The pharmacies give out sharps containers on request. At the pharmacy, the full containers are put into the shipping box. When the box is almost full, the pharmacy calls the County who notifies the waste hauler for pick-up.

Users in Columbia County favor the gallon-sized containers, which hold more waste than quart-sized containers and require fewer trips for disposal.

The program costs about \$12,000 annually for about 1000 containers, transportation and disposal. When the program started, it cost less to collect sharps than to follow-up needle stick injuries incurred by solid waste workers. While this is no longer the case, the benefits (i.e., lower worker compensation rates and less stress for workers and managers) still outweigh the costs. There have been no needle-related injuries for at least 10 years, and sharps are rarely seen in the sorting area of the County's recycling facility.

In 2001, Columbia and Jefferson counties began collecting animal sharps in cooperation with area veterinarians. The first container is free, disposal and a new container cost \$5. Even fewer sharps are now being seen on the recycling sort line.

For more information, contact Greg Kaminski, Columbia County Solid Waste Department, P.O. Box 370, Portage, 53901. (608) 742-6651. greg.kaminski@co.columbia.wi.us
<http://www.co.columbia.wi.us/columbiacounty/hhs/Divisions/PublicHealth/MedicationDisposal/tabid/2374/Default.aspx>

Brown County (population 255,000)

Brown County started collecting sharps in 1996. The founding coalition included county and city health departments, the county solid waste department, the state environmental agency (DNR), area hospitals, pharmacists, physicians, public works departments, infectious control providers, the regional diabetes and hemophilia associations, sharps users and waste haulers.

Brown County's Household Sharps program receives full sharps containers from households without cost to the user. While the program used to distribute containers and serve businesses, rising costs led the County to stop doing so in 2004.

Brown County sets an example for sharps collection programs in many ways:

- The program has a broad base of funding, including 17 municipalities, the Brown County Port and Resource Recovery Department, and 4 local hospitals (2013 data).
- Of the 37 collection sites (2013), most are in healthcare facilities and pharmacies.
- The County Health Department trains staff at all new sites that join the program.
- The County informs potential users about the program with brochures and a website.
- Sharps collection stations display the program's logo in their front windows to inform the public that they accept household sharps.
- The County surveys its collectors periodically. An early survey led the County to offer 1-quart containers for lancets in addition to the 1-gallon container for syringes. Recent surveys provide valuable input when the county selects waste vendor contracts.
- The County has documented statistics about its program, which is rare because state law exempts sharps collection stations from keeping records.

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The program has run smoothly except for one needlestick just after the program started, when a sharps collection station employee tried to pack full sharps containers in the shipping box more efficiently, despite being trained to handle the containers as little as possible.

The following table summarizes the results of the Brown County sharps program:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Weight collected</u>	<u>Containers distributed</u>	<u>Containers collected</u>	<u>Total cost</u>	<u>Cost/lb disposed</u>
June-Dec 1996	1567 lb	3192	unknown	\$ 9,035	\$ 5.77
1997	8654 lb	3353	unknown	\$10,555	\$ 1.22
1998	8519 lb	4757	unknown	\$13,128	\$ 1.54
1999	7121 lb	5923	unknown	\$16,937	\$ 2.38
2000	4729 lb	4892	unknown	\$20,092	\$ 3.97
2001	6276 lb	unknown	unknown	\$27,449	\$ 4.37
2002	6315 lb	unknown	unknown	\$30,582	\$ 4.84
2003	8863 lb	unknown	unknown	\$36,250	\$ 4.09
2004	8714 lb	unknown	unknown	\$11,193	\$ 1.28 *
2005	7120 lb	0	unknown	\$ 6,589	\$ 0.93
2006	6619 lb	0	unknown	\$ 7,167	\$ 1.08
2007	8084 lb	0	unknown	\$ 8,101	\$ 1.00
2008	8557 lb	0	unknown	\$ 9,380	\$ 1.10
2009	9526 lb	0	unknown	\$10,747	\$ 1.13
2010	9891 lb	0	unknown	\$10,782	\$ 1.09
2011	9490 lb	0	unknown	\$ 9,287	\$ 0.98
2012	9555 lb	0	unknown	\$ 8,835	\$ 0.92
2013	8527 lb	0	unknown	\$ 8,091	\$ 0.95

* The County stopped distributing sharps containers sometime in 2004

While the dollar amounts have not been adjusted for inflation, the table generally shows:

- Amounts collected initially increased then declined, and declined again just after the County stopped giving out sharps containers in 2004.
- Costs steadily increased, mainly due to rising costs of containers, until the County decided to no longer provide containers.
- The cost to the County rose to approximately \$5 per pound when it included the cost of containers and disposal.
- The cost to the County is currently around \$1 per pound just for disposal.

In 1997, based on weight, the County estimated that 500,000 to 600,000 sharps were collected, assuming all sharps were 1 cc syringes, all containers were full, and 20 to 25 containers were disposed in each storage tub.

Assuming each user generated 1 pound per year, even at \$5.00 per user (when the County also paid for the container), the program compared favorably with mail-back sharps containers, which would cost approximately \$20 to \$25 per container.

Brown County's success was published in the Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association (JAPHA), Nov/Dec 2002, Vol.42, No.6 Suppl.2.

<http://japha.org/article.aspx?articleid=1035727&resultClick=3>

To learn more about Brown County's Household Sharps Program:

- For station locations, visit <http://www.co.brown.wi.us/> and search for "household sharps program."
- For information about program costs and operation, contact Chris Blan at the Brown County Port and Resource Recovery Department, at 920-492-4954 or Blan_CH@co.brown.wi.us.
- For information about how the program started and how station operators are trained, contact Judy Friedrichs at the Brown County Health Department, at (920) 448-6404.

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Suggestions for Publicity

All publicity

1. Always provide a local phone number for people to call for more information; describe how much the service costs, and describe who may use your sharps collection station.
2. Either list the local sharps collection stations (name, address and phone) or say: *You can locate sharps collection stations by going to the DNR website at dnr.wi.gov and searching for “sharps disposal”.* Note: DNR prefers that you direct users to the Sharps Disposal page listing all disposal options, not simply to the list of registered sharps collection stations. Also, including only the DNR website URL prevents “broken links” later.
3. Publicize only DNR-registered or DNR-exempt sharps collection stations. If you are aware of any unregistered stations, please tell them about [Sharps Collection: Requirements for Collectors](#) (Publication WA807, available at <http://dnr.wi.gov/publications/>); it explains why and how to register and who qualifies for the exemption from registering.
4. If you mention DNR, list the DNR phone number as (608) 266-2111 (not the DNR medical waste coordinator's direct line).
5. Tell local public health and sanitation departments and others about your program. They may receive inquiries from the public.
6. Let people know that sharps containers are a reimbursable expense under Medicaid. (Transportation, treatment and disposal of full containers are not reimbursable expenses.) Persons enrolled in Medicaid should ask their doctor how to obtain the containers, which are available in sizes from one quart to eight gallons.

Literature

7. Include the locations of your local sharps collection stations. Consider including stations in adjacent areas for those who commute into your area.
8. Print brochures on heavier paper such as 60 to 70 pound book stock (this is equivalent to 20 pound bond). Heavy paper is essential when mailing without envelopes. White paper with large black ink is best for persons with visual impairments.
9. Distribute brochures to area pharmacies and to people who are in contact with the users you identified above.
10. Visit the DNR’s website occasionally for the latest versions of brochures, posters and bill fliers for the public, including versions in Spanish and Hmong. They are on the DNR website at <http://dnr.wi.gov> , search for “sharps disposal”

Websites

11. Make it easy for your users to find your information. On the page that discusses sharps disposal, use various terms that the public may search for, such as “household sharps”, “syringe disposal” and the like.
12. Include this essential information on your website:
 - instructions for packaging sharps
 - locations of local sharps stations, address, phone number and other relevant information
 - a statement that it is illegal to put sharps in the regular trash (essential)
 - a link for users to find out more about sharps collection stations by going to the DNR website at <http://dnr.wi.gov> and searching for “sharps disposal”. Note: DNR prefers to direct users to its page listing all their disposal options, not simply to the list of registered sharps collection stations.

Examples of websites that present the essential information include:

Adams County <http://www.co.adams.wi.gov/> search for “sharps collection program”

Brown County <http://www.co.brown.wi.us/> search for “household sharps program”

City of West Allis <http://www.westalliswi.gov/> search for “sharps disposal”

Outagamie County <http://www.outagamie.org/> search for “household sharps disposal”

Aurora pharmacies <http://www.aurorahealthcare.org/services/pharmacy/sharps.asp>

City of Madison <http://www.cityofmadison.com/streets/hazardous/householdsharps.cfm>

Videos

13. Develop a short video or two to educate the public about sharps disposal, to encourage local healthcare providers to inform their clients about sharps disposal and to invite organizations to collect sharps. For examples, you may contact Brown County, which produced two VHS videos, entitled: "Using the Household Sharps Collection Program" for home generators and "Sharps Collection Station Training" for SCS operators and employees. For copies, contact Judy Friedrichs, Brown County Health Department, (920) 448-6404.

Newspapers/radio/TV news

14. Use or modify the press release on sharps collection, which follows this section. You may revise it to fit your local situation. For example, for a local spin, call your local DNR office (ask for the waste management specialist) or licensed infectious waste transporters in your area. With permission of local DNR staff, you may substitute their name for Barb Bickford's name in any of the quotes.

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Sample Press Release

SHARP MEDICAL ITEMS NEED PROPER DISPOSAL

MADISON, Wis. -- Health care patients, such as people with diabetes, who use syringes, lancets and other sharp medical items at home should properly dispose of these items separately from their household trash to reduce the health risks to waste management workers, according to a state medical waste specialist.

Needles that are improperly disposed of could expose people who collect and handle garbage to infectious diseases such as hepatitis and HIV. Such workers who receive a puncture wound from an improperly disposed of needle have to undergo expensive testing and are placed under long-term emotional stress.

Under Wisconsin law, all infectious waste, including sharp medical items -- usually referred to as "sharps" -- must be incinerated or otherwise treated before being disposed of in a landfill, explains Barb Bickford, medical waste coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources.

"Requirements for packaging and disposing of sharps apply to everyone in Wisconsin, including people who use these items at home," Bickford says. Infectious wastes generated in the home that do not have sharp parts may be bagged in plastic and disposed of with other household waste, she adds.

To encourage people who generate sharps at home to properly dispose of them, the DNR encourages pharmacies, hospitals, local governments, businesses and other organizations to set up "sharps collection stations" where home generators can drop off their discarded needles and other sharps.

Under a medical waste law adopted by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1994, operators of collection programs are responsible for arranging to have the items properly treated and disposed of, and they may only charge what it costs to operate the collection service. The collection stations must also register with DNR so people can locate disposal sites in their area.

"Low-cost, convenient collection programs are the crucial link between people who generate small amounts of sharps and proper disposal," Bickford says.

There are currently more than 500 registered sharps collection stations statewide, with at least one in 68 of Wisconsin's 72 counties.

To assist more groups in setting up collection stations, the DNR has distributed informational packets offering guidance on how to set up and operate a sharps collection station and on how people who generate this waste in the home should package the items for disposal. The packets have been distributed to groups that represent hospitals, clinics, home care associations, and other groups likely to have contact with people who have diabetes and others who generate sharps.

While operators of collection programs are responsible for seeing that sharps are taken to a treatment center, people who generate sharps are responsible for making sure the items are properly packaged for collection, Bickford says.

"In some cases, operators of the collection service provide or sell sharps containers. Most pharmacies also sell sharps containers, and disposable containers are a reimbursable expense under Medicaid," she adds.

To properly package sharp items for collection:

- Place the sharp items in rigid, puncture-resistant containers with secure lids or caps. In addition to commercially available sharps containers, heavy duty detergent bottles with screw caps are acceptable. Coffee cans are not acceptable because their lids are too easily punctured.
- Visibly label the sharps container with the words "bio-hazard," "infectious waste," or "sharps," or with the

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bio-hazard emblem.

- Seal the container, store it out of reach of children, and take it to a registered sharps collection station. Do not recycle the container or the sharps.

To find local options for disposing of household sharps, visit the DNR website at <http://dnr.wi.gov> and search for “sharps disposal.”

"People who live in areas without sharps collection stations can make other arrangements to properly dispose of these items, such as contracting with a private medical waste hauler or using mail-back disposal services," Bickford says. People interested in setting up a sharps collection program can find out more on the DNR Website, by searching for “sharp collection”.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Barb Bickford at (608) 267-3548 or barbara.bickford@wisconsin.gov.

For more information

Access Wisconsin’s infectious waste rules about sharps collection in s. NR 526.09(5).
www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/nr/nr526.html

Go to DNR’s website at <http://dnr.wi.gov> and search for:

- “healthcare waste” for generators of healthcare waste
- “sharps collection” for persons collection sharps
- “sharps disposal” for persons generating household sharps

For DNR publications, go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/publications/> and choose “Waste & materials management”. You may search for the category “medical/infectious waste” or for a particular publication title or number, such as WA807.

Send an email to: DNRMedicalWaste@Wisconsin.gov or a letter to:

DNR Medical Waste Coordinator
Waste and Materials Management (WA/5)
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Call the Waste and Materials Management Program general number at (608) 266-2111 and ask to have your call redirected.

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