

1-1-2013

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Maine Department of Environmental Protection

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Recommended Citation

Maine Department of Environmental Protection, "Safe Sharps Disposal Education Campaign Report" (2013). *Environmental Protection Documents*. 32.
https://digitalmaine.com/dep_docs/32

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**Report to the Joint Standing Committee
on Environment and Natural Resources
126th Legislature, First Session**

Safe Sharps Disposal Education Campaign Report

January, 2013

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MAINE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
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In 2012, the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (ENR Committee) charged representatives of the medical technology, pharmaceutical and solid waste industry; public health officials; and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) with meeting to discuss opportunities for collaboration in educating Mainers about the appropriate steps to safely dispose of used household medical sharps. In June, DEP Commissioner Patricia W. Aho convened a group of those interested parties for that discussion. The awareness campaign that resulted from that conversation reflects a positive partnership that educated and empowered a multitude of sharps users about safe disposal options given existing resources and regulations that are most affordable and appropriate for the user.

The awareness campaign was formally launched in September at a press conference held at the pharmacy counter of an Augusta Rite Aid (Maine's largest pharmacy chain with 79 stores), where remarks were given by Governor Paul R. LePage, Commissioner Aho, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Sheila Pinette, the 125th Legislature's ENR Committee Co-Chairs Sen. Tom Saviello and Rep. Jim Hamper, and Rite Aid Regional Pharmacy Vice President Rob Mullins. The initiative included:

- The creation of 40,000 full-color educational brochures – developed by DEP with printing provided by Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD) – that were distributed through Maine pharmacies including Rite Aid, Hannaford, Walgreens, CVS and community pharmacies with assistance from the individual pharmacies and the Retail Association of Maine (formerly Maine Merchants Association). Brochures were also distributed through the Maine Association of Diabetes Educators' conference, available directly from DEP and CDC, and mailed with an informational letter to 6,700 MaineCare recipients who are also sharps users.
- The development and launch of Maine's first-ever safe sharps containment and disposal educational website at www.maine.gov/dep/sharps that was promoted on DEP's homepage from September to December. In addition to information on proper containment and disposal options and a form where visitors could request a free clipping device, the page also includes an instructional video featuring Commissioner Aho explaining different disposal resources – both homemade and store-bought – that was filmed in the Blaine House kitchen. BD also featured a direct link to this new page on its own website.
- The distribution of 3,000 free BD Safe-Clips™ needle clipping devices – donated by BD and Rite Aid – and given to sharps users at Maine's largest pharmacy chain Rite Aid throughout September and by DEP on request (submitted via a website form or phone call). The device is a convenient clipping and sharps storage tool that retails for around \$6 and holds up to 1500 needle tips before it is secured with tape and safely disposed of with household waste.
- A strategic print advertising campaign run in November (National Diabetes Awareness Month) – implemented by DEP using \$8,000 donated by an anonymous industry association. The mostly quarter-page ads summarizing safe disposal and referring to DEP's

sharps website appeared at least once in Maine Seniors Magazine and weekly newspapers in every county with extended ad buys in the five counties that have the state's highest diabetes rates (Aroostook, Franklin, Oxford, Penobscot and Somerset).

- The dissemination of an educational column to all Maine media outlets and educational booths spotlighting safe disposal at the Common Ground Fair in September and the annual Maine Diabetes Educators Conference in October.

With this campaign, the partners sought to send a simple, straightforward message: While the management of medical conditions like diabetes, arthritis and allergies can be overwhelming, the safe disposal of the sharps used at home to treat them doesn't have to be.

The approach of an education effort was appropriate because the question sharps users consistently have posed to the DEP and the ENR Committee was "How?" when it comes to disposing of sharps safely. Never before has there been any coordinated outreach in Maine about safe household sharps disposal, and historically, even the language about disposal for household users on the DEP's own website was seen as confusing and regulatory rather than real-world, offering household users disposal options better suited for the biomedical waste industry that proved inaccessible and unaffordable.

Once home sharps users learn that properly containerized used household sharps can and should be disposed of conveniently in the household trash, those people can protect themselves and their loved ones, while also safeguarding public health and Maine's environment. DEP's experience implementing this educational campaign with industry and public health partners demonstrates that continued educational efforts like this about the multitude of home disposal solutions are most effective in providing a meaningful and sustainable solution to safe home used sharps disposal in Maine. We look forward to applying this collaborative model to other aspects of our important work protecting public and environmental health.

Appendix A: Safe Sharps Disposal Brochure

Safe Disposal of Sharps

Why It's Important

Needle stick injuries are a serious public health risk, causing great stress to victims and costing thousands of dollars for medical testing.

Each year thousands of Mainers use millions of needles and lancets or "sharps" as part of their routine for controlling medical conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, severe allergies and migraines. Improper disposal of these sharps into household or workplace trash or by flushing them down the toilet puts you and your family, janitorial and solid waste staff, and the general public at risk for accidental needle sticks. Needle stick injuries are a serious public health risk because of the potential for transmission of blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS.

Simply *recapping a syringe is **not** enough to protect against needle sticks.*

"Sharps" Include

- Syringes
- Pen and pump needles
- Lancets
- Infusion sets

This brochure was brought to you by:



www.maine.gov/dep



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention
An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc

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PROPER DISPOSAL OF HOUSEHOLD SHARPS IN THE STATE OF MAINE



What Should I Do With My Used Sharps?

Proper Containment and Disposal Practices

Handling Sharps at Home

Place used syringes, pen needles, lancets and other sharps in rigid containers resistant to leaks and punctures. *Label filled containers "DO NOT RECYCLE."*



Needle Clipping Devices

Devices that clip the needle off of a syringe allow you to throw the remaining piece in your household trash. Wrap the full device in heavy-duty tape and dispose in your trash.

Commercially Available & Mail-Back Sharps Containers

Filled commercial sharps containers (like the ones seen here) may be placed with household trash. Mail-back containers are designed to be filled and mailed to the manufacturer or manufacturer's disposal partner for proper disposal. While sharps containers may be available for purchase at your local pharmacy, some manufacturers may also provide containers free of charge through patient support programs (registration may be required). Contact the manufacturer for details.

Household Sharps Containers

Make your own sharps container using a heavy plastic bottle with a screw-on cap such as an old liquid laundry soap bottle. Seal with heavy-duty tape and label before disposing in your trash.

Getting Rid of the Waste

Local Hospitals

Some hospitals may accept used household sharps and dispose of them as part of their waste stream. Contact the Environmental Services Department at your local hospital for more information.

When You Are Away From Home

All Maine Turnpike Authority rest stops, some Maine airports and some retail stores have sharps disposal boxes for use while you are away from home.

Loose syringes, lancets and other sharps should never be thrown in the trash.

Please Don't...

- Throw loose sharps into the trash or toilet.
- Leave sharps anywhere they could injure someone.
- Store used sharps in glass bottles, soda bottles, milk jugs, aluminum cans, coffee cans, or plastic bags.
- Put containers of used sharps in with recycling.

Proper disposal means:

- ✓ Clipping needles OR
- ✓ Placing sharps in proper containers
- ✓ Labeling containers
- ✓ "DO NOT RECYCLE"
- ✓ Using heavy-duty tape to secure container lids

For more information, contact the Maine Department of Environmental Protection

Biomedical Waste Program at (207) 287-2651 or visit www.maine.gov/dep/sharps

Appendix B: Safe Sharps Disposal Print Ad

Managing diabetes, arthritis or allergies can be overwhelming. Safe disposal of the sharps used to treat them doesn't have to be.



If you or a loved one use sharps at home, Maine law allows for their disposal in your household trash if these steps to safety are followed. Place sharps in a puncture-proof container like a detergent bottle, red sharps bucket from your pharmacy or needle clipper. When full, secure with tape, label "Do Not Recycle" and throw away. Please never toss loose sharps in the trash or toilet which puts your family at risk for accidental sticks.

**More on safe disposal or a free needle clipper:
(207) 287-7854 | www.maine.gov/dep/sharps**

This message brought to you by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection

Appendix C: Safe Sharps Disposal Pharmacy Counter Card

Picking Up Injectable Medications Today?

Here Is What You Need To Know...

Needle stick injuries are serious, causing great stress to victims and costing thousands of dollars for medical testing. Protect your family, sanitation workers and the general public by properly handling your sharps.

Handling Sharps at Home

Place used syringes, pen needles, lancets and other sharps in rigid containers resistant to leaks and punctures. Label filled containers **“DO NOT RECYCLE.”**



Needle Clipping Devices

Devices that clip the needle off of a syringe allow you to throw the remaining piece in your household trash. Wrap the full device in heavy-duty tape and dispose in your trash.



Commercially Available & Mail-Back Sharps Containers

Filled commercial sharps containers (like the ones seen here) may be placed with household trash. Mail-back containers are designed to be filled and mailed to the manufacturer or manufacturer's disposal partner for proper disposal. While sharps containers may be available for purchase at your local pharmacy, some manufacturers may also provide containers free of charge through patient support programs (registration may be required). Contact the manufacturer for more details.



Household Sharps Containers

Make your own sharps container using a heavy plastic bottle with a screw-on cap such as an old liquid laundry soap bottle. Seal with heavy-duty tape **and label** before disposing in your trash.

For More Information

For a list of locations for sharps disposal while away from home, or for more information about proper sharps containment and disposal call the Maine Department of Environmental Protection Biomedical Waste Program at **(207) 287-2651** or go to: **www.maine.gov/dep/sharps**.

Proper disposal means:

- ☒ Clipping needles **OR**
- ☒ Placing sharps in proper containers
- ☒ Labeling containers **“DO NOT RECYCLE”**
- ☒ Using heavy-duty tape to secure container lids