Sharps Management Guidelines
What is the purpose of this document?

The purpose of this document is to help councils assess and manage risks associated with unsafe or inappropriate disposal of community sharps. The information provided will enable councils to:

- Understand the importance and legislative context of community sharps management;
- Understand the roles of various parts of the community in safe sharps disposal; and
- Understand the specifics of how to develop a strategic approach/sharps management plan.

Definitions to keep in mind:

**Community sharps** – sharps (i.e. needles, syringes, lancets, and finger prickers) that are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare or recreation. Sharps waste generated by diabetic users is a large contributor.

**Sharps waste** – a type of "controlled waste" under section 3 of the Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994 (EMPCA).

**Sharps container** – used for the collection of sharp items in health or veterinary care; research; skin penetration or the injection of drugs or other substances for medical or non-medical reasons.

Why are guidelines for community sharps management important?

Community sharps are generated from a number of sources, including people who inject illicit drugs, people with medical conditions that involve regular self-injection in the home (e.g. diabetes), and vaccination and medical procedures for livestock and pets.

Inappropriate disposal of community sharps pose a health and safety risk to the public, council employees, waste contractors, and resource recovery operators involved with municipal waste and recycling. Well managed community sharps where people have reasonable access to safe disposal facilities are therefore important and can contribute to the health and safety of communities.

Whose responsibility is community sharps management?

A collaborative approach between councils, the community, and State Government is required in order to effectively manage community sharps and create sustainable environments – sharps management is a shared responsibility!

**State Government** – is responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating public health and waste management policies. This may range from developing legislation to delivering or administering services. Health services support councils in the safe disposal of community sharps by:

- Providing information on appropriate disposal practices to patients and clients who are managing their health care in the home environment; and
- Providing community sharps disposal services and facilities at public hospitals.
Local Government – councils have an important role to play in managing risks associated with the unsafe or inappropriate disposal of community sharps. They are responsible for providing a safe working environment for staff and contractors, such as parks and garden staff, and for ensuring the safety of those who use public spaces that are under council management.

A significant number of councils have successfully addressed and responded to community sharps management. This benefits communities and at the same time addresses community service and statutory obligations, including:

- **Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994;**
- **Public Health Act 1997;**
- **Local Government Act 1993;**
- **Work Health and Safety Act 2012;** and
- **Australian Standard 4031-1992.**

Community – members of the community who use injecting equipment have a responsibility to dispose of their equipment safely. See Appendix A for a list of council provided disposal facilities.

Waste and recycling contractors – although contractors have no direct control over the community sharps disposal practices of residents, they can reduce workplace safety risks from inappropriate disposal by supporting council activities to encourage safe disposal and by providing appropriate disposal options.

How can councils contribute to community sharps management?

It is important that community sharps are effectively managed in order to prevent accidental injury or re-use of inappropriately discarded community sharps. Councils can contribute to this by:

- Providing and promoting appropriate disposal options that are easily accessible in order to reduce the number of community sharps present in the public and workplace;
- Ensuring employees and contractors have appropriate knowledge, training and equipment to safely undertake their workplace activities; and
- Raising community awareness on safe sharps disposal.

A community sharps management plan could assist councils in achieving the above. According to the **NSW Government Community Sharps Management Guideline**, such a plan should include:

**A statement about the organisation’s commitment to managing community sharps**

This statement might include a policy on community sharps management and/or a documented risk management process and related procedures (e.g. the **Approved Management Method for Clinical and Related Waste 2007**). The latter is a document that specifies the minimum standards for clinical and related waste management including; the definition and classification, segregation, safe packaging and labelling, storage, transport and disposal of wastes arising from healthcare settings.

Council specific policies should aim to promote a safe environment in which to work, recreate, reside and visit by minimising the risk of inappropriately discarded needles on public land and property (e.g. **City of Vincent Policy 3.8.4**).
An outline of effective partnerships and consultation with other stakeholders

Community consultation and having key stakeholders (e.g. Pharmacy Guild of Australia, Diabetes Australia, EPA Tasmania) on an advisory committee can help individual councils understand community disposal requirements when preparing a policy. Community consultation will also provide access to information about injecting hotspots and issues around unsafe disposal.

Community sharps awareness raising strategies on safe disposal practices and facilities

Providing facilities for safe disposal of community sharps may be seen by some as encouraging illegal activities. It is therefore critical that councils and their partners are guided by consultation and evidence in their approach to managing community sharps disposal and educating their community.

Community education strategies might include:

- Publishing media releases in local press;
- Broadcasting messages on local radio, the Council newsletter, website and social media;
- Promoting the location of community sharps bins; and
- Advising residents about how to report syringe litter.

A documented process for regular performance monitoring and review

Consulting with health centres and monitoring discarded syringes and complaints about community sharps can help councils determine the most appropriate infrastructure and response. Council can also monitor community sharps by:

- Checking community sharps bins for usage and condition;
- Identifying local hotspots and performing regular needle and syringe sweeps;
- Recording maintenance of community sharps bins in a Community Sharps Bin Register; and
- Keeping an incident report database.

Other strategies include providing links to waste management strategies and details of accessible and affordable community sharps disposal options. Broad implementation strategies could include:

- Providing sharps disposal bins in bathrooms, community pharmacies, and other locations;
- Removing community sharps litter;
- Providing appropriate collection equipment;
- Providing suitable personal protective equipment; and
- Arranging transport of sharps waste by a licensed contractor.

No single strategy will be appropriate for all council areas. Geographic and demographic issues as well as resources and infrastructure will affect the degree of risk and the approach taken. The latter may also depend upon the level of the problem, which can be assessed using a variety of indicators:

- Number of requests for sharps bins to be installed in new locations;
- Extent to which community are supportive and engaged in management of sharps bins;
- Number of complaints about incorrectly disposed sharps;
- Safety scores by community members in areas without sharps bins installed; and
- Number of people who visit targeted locations (e.g. pharmacies) at specified times.
Some examples to draw upon

City of Sydney

A pilot project to trial sharps waste management in the Northcott social housing community was implemented by the City of Sydney. Community information, education, and consultation sessions were implemented to create a sense of ownership, and involved the following topics:

- Harm minimisation and the NSW Needle and Syringe Program;
- Safe collection and disposal of community sharps; and
- Understanding the risks associated with community sharps.

Key outcomes: The diversion of 10,710 sharps over 12 months and increased use of sharps containers. For more information, see here.

Logan City Council

The Logan Community Sharps Strategy aimed to facilitate innovative and responsive approaches to reducing the risks associated with inappropriately discarded sharps. The three objectives of this strategy were:

1. Maximising appropriate sharps disposal;
2. Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement; and
3. Promoting population health and harm reduction.

The strategies and actions (e.g. providing an effective network of disposal facilities, ensuring the timely collection of disposed sharps, promoting risk awareness) accompanying these objectives have been thoroughly explained and provide a useful guide for councils wanting to adopt a similar plan(s). For more information, see here.

References:


Useful contacts

**Pharmacy Guild**

**P:** 13 484 53  
**E:** guild.tas@guild.org.au

**Diabetes Australia**

**P:** (03) 6215 9000  
**E:** mail@diabetestas.org.au

**WorkSafe Tasmania**

**P:** 1300 366 322  
**E:** wstinfo@justice.tas.gov.au

**Department of Health and Human Services**

**P:** 1300 139 641

**Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and the Environment**

**P:** (03) 6233 6518  
**E:** EnvironmentEnquiries@environment.tas.gov.au
Appendix 1: Where are community sharps deposited?

Community sharps are deposited in a variety of places, including the residential waste stream, public places, commercial premises, and community sharps disposal bins. The table below provides a statewide picture of community sharps disposal/management by councils in Tasmania, compiled in late 2018:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Provides sharps containers</th>
<th>Accepts full containers</th>
<th>Council address</th>
<th>Disposal points for single sharps</th>
<th>Issues reported by Council in relation to disposal</th>
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<tr>
<td>BREAK O’DAY</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>32-34 Georges Esplanade, St Helens</td>
<td>Public toilets</td>
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<td>BRIGHTON</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>1 Tivoli Road, Old Beach</td>
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<tr>
<td>BURNIE</td>
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<td>80 Wilson Street, Burnie</td>
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<td>19 King Edward Street, Ulverstone</td>
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<td>CENTRAL HIGHLANDS</td>
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<td>19 Alexander Street, Bothwell</td>
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<td>CIRCULAR HEAD</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>33 Goldie Street, Smithton</td>
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<td>CLARENCE</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>38 Bligh Street, Rosny Park</td>
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<td>DERWENT VALLEY</td>
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<td>DORSET</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>3 Ellenor Street, Scottsdale</td>
<td>Soldiers Memorial Hospital</td>
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<td>FLINDERS</td>
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<td>4 Davies Street, Whitemark</td>
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<tr>
<td>GEORGE TOWN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16-18 Anne Street, George Town</td>
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<td>GLAMORGAN SPRING BAY</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>GLENORCHY</td>
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<td>KENTISH</td>
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<td>KINGBOROUGH</td>
<td>15 Channel Highway, Kingston</td>
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<td>KING ISLAND</td>
<td>10 George Street, Currie</td>
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<td>LATROBE</td>
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<td>LAUNCESTON</td>
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<td>MEANDER VALLEY</td>
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<td>NORTHERN MIDLANDS</td>
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<td>SORRELL</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTHERN MIDLANDS</td>
<td>71 High Street, Oatlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>TASMAN</td>
<td>1713 Main Road, Nubeena</td>
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<tr>
<td>WARATAH WYNYARD</td>
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<td>Public toilets</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEST COAST</td>
<td>11 Sticht Street, Queenstown</td>
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<td>WEST TAMAR</td>
<td>2-4 Eden Street, Riverside</td>
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_Last updated_: March 2019