

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 safe 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 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 (refer to the [*City of Vincent Policy 3.8.4 as an example*](#)).

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

Moree Plains Shire Council

Moree Plains Shire Council introduced a comprehensive sharps management program involving:

1. Collection of statistics on incorrect sharps disposal hotspots;
2. Provision of increased disposal options;
3. Public awareness campaign on disposal options; and
4. Proactive audits of parks and open spaces.

Key outcomes: A reduction in inappropriately discarded sharps, confidence in dealing with the collection of inappropriately discarded sharps, improved community awareness, and disposal of sharps at strategically placed collection bins. 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](#).

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](#).

References:

City of Vincent. (2013). *Safe Needle and Syringe Collection and Disposal Strategy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vincent.wa.gov.au/documents/615/384-safe-needle-syringe-collection-and-disposal-strategy>

Department of Tourism, Arts and the Environment. (2007). *Approved Management Method for Clinical and Related Waste*. Retrieved from: https://epa.tas.gov.au/Documents/AMM_Clinical_and_Related_Waste.pdf

Local Government NSW. (2013). *Northcott Community Sharps Management Project*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lgnsw.org.au/files/imce-uploads/127/northcott-community-sharps-sydney.pdf>

Local Government NSW. (2014). *Moree Community Sharps Program*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lgnsw.org.au/files/imce-uploads/127/community-sharps-program-moree.pdf>

Logan City Council. (2012-2014). *Logan Community Sharps Management Strategy*. Retrieved from: https://www.logan.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/7008/Community-Sharps-Management-Strategy-2012-2014.pdf

NSW Government. (2017). *Community Sharps Management*. Retrieved from: https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/GL2017_023.pdf

Useful contacts

Pharmacy Guild

P: 13 484 53

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Diabetes Australia

P: (03) 6215 9000

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WorkSafe Tasmania

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Department of Health and Human Services

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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:

Council	Provides sharps containers	Accepts full containers	Council address	Disposal points for single sharps
BREAK O'DAY	✓	✓	32-34 Georges Esplanade, St Helens	Public toilets
BRIGHTON	✓	✓	1 Tivoli Road, Old Beach	
BURNIE	✓	✓	80 Wilson Street, Burnie	Public toilets
CENTRAL COAST	✓	✓	19 King Edward Street, Ulverstone	Public toilets
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS		✓	19 Alexander Street, Bothwell	
CIRCULAR HEAD	✓	✓	33 Goldie Street, Smithton	Public toilets
CLARENCE	✓	✓	38 Bligh Street, Rosny Park	Public toilets
DERWENT VALLEY	✓	✓	Circle Street, New Norfolk	
DEVONPORT	✓	✓	137 Rooke Street, Devonport	Public toilets
DORSET	✓	✓	3 Ellenor Street, Scottsdale	Soldiers Memorial Hospital
FLINDERS			4 Davies Street, Whitemark	
GEORGE TOWN			16-18 Anne Street, George Town	Public toilets
GLAMORGAN SPRING BAY	✓	✓	9 Melbourne Street, Triabunna	
GLENORCHY	✓	✓	374 Main Road, Glenorchy	
HOBART	✓	✓	16 Elizabeth Street, Hobart	

HUON VALLEY	✓	✓	40 Main Street, Huonville	
KENTISH	✓	✓	69 High Street, Sheffield	
KINGBOROUGH	✓	✓	15 Channel Highway, Kingston	Public toilets
KING ISLAND			10 George Street, Currie	
LATROBE	✓	✓	170 Gilbert Street, Latrobe	
LAUNCESTON	✓	✓	18-28 St John Street, Launceston	Community pharmacies
MEANDER VALLEY	✓	✓	26 Lyall Street, Westbury	
NORTHERN MIDLANDS	✓	✓	13 Smith Street, Longford	Public toilets
SORELL		✓	47 Cole Street, Sorrell	
SOUTHERN MIDLANDS	✓	✓	71 High Street, Oatlands	
TASMAN			1713 Main Road, Nubeena	
WARATAH WYNYPARD	✓	✓	21 Saunders Street, Wynyard	Public toilets
WEST COAST			11 Sticht Street, Queenstown	
WEST TAMAR	✓	✓	2-4 Eden Street, Riverside	

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