Community Sharps Management

Summary
This Guideline has been developed to help NSW councils assess and manage risks and minimise harm associated with unsafe or inappropriate disposal of community sharps.

Sharps which are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare or recreation are called community sharps. This includes needles, syringes, lancets and prickers resulting from self-injection at private residences and self-injection in public places that are not placed in a designated sharps container provided by a business, commercial or community service activity.

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Secretary, NSW Health
This Policy Directive may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Compliance with this directive is mandatory for NSW Health and is a condition of subsidy for public health organisations.
COMMUNITY SHARPS MANAGEMENT

PURPOSE
The Community Sharps Management Guidelines have been developed to help NSW councils assess and manage risks and minimise harm associated with unsafe or inappropriate disposal of community sharps. Councils, Local Health Districts, government and some non-government organisations all have a role in providing an effective disposal infrastructure and in encouraging safe disposal.

These guidelines replace the Community Sharps Management Guidelines for NSW Councils (2004).

KEY PRINCIPLES
Sharps which are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare or recreation are called community sharps. This includes needles, syringes, lancets and prickers resulting from self-injection at private residences and self-injection in public places that are not placed in a designated sharps container provided by a business, commercial or community service activity.

Although no single strategy will be appropriate for all local government areas, the following general principles apply to all community sharps disposal services and infrastructure.

Public health - A focus on improving public health for the whole community.

Harm reduction - A focus on management activities that promote better health, social and economic outcomes for both the individual and the community.

Collaboration - Consultation with partners including all levels of government, local health and social services, business groups, waste management contractors, residents and other stakeholders.

Capacity building - Providing appropriate resources and encouraging the community and other stakeholders to maintain sustainable local community sharps management activities.

USE OF THE GUIDELINE
These guidelines promote a shared responsibility model that encourages engagement by NSW councils of a range of stakeholders to coordinate and deliver a local community sharps management program. Potential partners include state government agencies, medical equipment manufacturers, waste and recycling contractors, local businesses, non-government organisations, and local/regional healthcare services.
REVISION HISTORY

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<tr>
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1 Acknowledgement

The Community Sharps Management (CSM) Guideline is a result of consultation with many organisations. The NSW Ministry of Health acknowledges and thanks the following for their contribution:

- Community Sharps Management Program Advisory Committee
- Diabetes NSW
- Local Government NSW
- Blacktown City Council
- City of Sydney
- Mid North Coast, Northern NSW, South Eastern Sydney, Sydney, Western Sydney Western NSW and Far Western NSW Local Health Districts
- NSW Environment Protection Authority
- Regional Networks for Effective Waste Management (RENEW) NSW
- Medical Technology Association of Australia
- Pharmacy Guild of Australia NSW
- Australian and New Zealand Clinical Waste Management Industry Group
- NetWaste Councils
- WorkCover NSW
- Waste Management Association of Australia-NSW Waste Contractors and Recyclers Association of NSW

And special thanks to the

- Local Government Association of Queensland
  for granting permission for the NSW Ministry of Health to use the publication *Community Sharps Handbook* (June 2012) as a primary source document.
From parks to public toilets and waste bins, councils across NSW deal with sharps in the community on a daily basis. When disposed of incorrectly, sharps pose health and safety risks which must be carefully managed.

Many councils now have sharps collection and disposal services in place. These often include the placement of sharps receptacles in public places and coordination with pharmacies for the return of used sharps for safe disposal. Despite the important actions taken to manage sharps to date, unsafe or inappropriate disposal of sharps waste is an ongoing community waste problem.

The good news is that since the first edition of the Community Sharps Management Guidelines (the Guidelines) was published, awareness and behaviour has improved significantly. Other land managers and industry stakeholders have come to the table to tackle this issue, and the additional assistance NSW Health provided through council sharps management grants has reinforced shifts in behaviour and awareness.

The Guidelines have been updated to reflect current legislation and practices and they emphasise the need for a local sharps management plan. When applied in practice, this will help councils provide both safe public spaces for the community and safe workplaces for council staff and contractors.

Local Government NSW welcomes the revised edition of the Guidelines and encourages councils to apply them when managing sharps for our communities.

Cr Keith Rhoades AFSM
President
Local Government NSW
2 Background

2.1 About this document

**Purpose and use of the Community Sharps Management Guideline**

The CSM Guideline is for NSW councils and others involved in the management of community sharps. They have been developed to help NSW councils assess and manage risks and minimise harm associated with unsafe or inappropriate disposal of community sharps. Councils, Local Health Districts, government and some non-government organisations all have a role in providing an effective disposal infrastructure and in encouraging safe disposal. The Guideline encourages a collaborative approach between councils to effectively manage community sharps and create sustainable environments.

**This Guideline will help councils to:**

- understand the relevant legislative provisions
- identify roles and partnership opportunities
- develop options for managing community sharps
- develop a strategic approach to managing community sharps
- develop a community sharps management plan.

**Key principles**

Although no single strategy will be appropriate for all local government areas, the following general principles apply to all community sharps disposal services and infrastructure.

**Public health** - a focus on improving public health for the whole community.

**Harm reduction** - a focus that reduces any adverse health, social and economic consequences of drug-related harm on individuals and communities.

**Collaboration** - consultation with partners including all levels of government, local health and social services, business groups, waste management contractors, residents and other stakeholders.

**Capacity building** - providing appropriate resources and encouraging the community and other stakeholders to maintain sustainable local community sharps management activities.

2.2 Key definitions

**Sharps waste** - defined in Schedule 1 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 and the EPA’s Waste Classification Guidelines as any waste collected from
designated sharps waste containers used in the course of business, commercial or community service activities:

- Human health care by health professionals or health care providers (either at health facilities or at home)
- Medical research or work on cadavers
- Veterinary care or veterinary research, or
- Skin penetration or the injection of drugs or other substances for medical or non-medical reasons

This does not include waste that has been treated on the site where it was generated (and to a standard specified in an EPA Gazette notice) or waste that has been treated by a method approved in writing by the Secretary of the NSW Ministry of Health.

**Community sharps** - sharps that are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare or recreation are called community sharps. This includes needles, syringes, lancets and finger prickers resulting from self-injection at private residences and self-injection in public places that are not placed in a designated sharps container provided by a business, commercial or community service activity.

Community sharps are *not defined as sharps waste and special waste* to facilitate the management of municipal solid waste. Classifying personal-use sharps that are inadequately disposed of into the municipal solid waste stream as special waste would add significant complexities and costs for councils.

**Sharps container** - a container that complies with Australian standards. Sharps containers are used for the collection of sharp items used in health or veterinary care; research; skin penetration or the injection of drugs or other substances for medical or non-medical reasons.

### 2.3 Legislative and policy framework for local government

**Environmental legislation**


Depositing (littering) in or on a public place or an open private place is an offence under Section 145 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act. Under Section 145A, littering with a syringe constitutes aggravated littering and carries a penalty of $375 for an individual or $750 for a corporation. If the matter is heard in court, this offence carries a maximum penalty of $3,300 for an individual or $5,500 for a corporation.
Disposal of community sharps to household waste bins, public litter bins, and general solid waste landfills, however, is not prohibited under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act.

Local government legislation

The Local Government Act 1993 requires councils to provide services that meet the reasonable needs of local communities. Under Section 124 (Order 22) of the Local Government Act, local councils may direct the owners and occupiers of residential premises to manage their community sharps in a way that is acceptable to the council from a workplace health and safety or other perspective. This may include prohibiting disposal of community sharps to domestic waste and recycling services.

Orders 21 (keeping land or premises in a safe or healthy condition) and 27 (removal of dangerous objects from a public place) are also relevant. Section 630 of the Local Government Act makes it an offence to break or leave a syringe in a public place.

Public Health Regulation 2012

Part 4, Division 3, Clause 27 of the Public Health Regulation 2012 states that a person who uses a needle or a non-reusable sharp in a skin penetration procedure must dispose of the needle or sharp in the appropriate sharps container immediately after completing the procedure. The Regulation states that any business that uses sharps must place the sharps immediately after use in an appropriate sharps container.

Workplace health and safety legislation

The following SafeWork notifiable incidents are defined in Section 38 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 No 10:

- The death of a person
- A serious injury or illness of a person
- A potentially dangerous incident

Notifiable incidents should be reported to SafeWork NSW on 13 10 50.

The NSW Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy (WARR)

The Waste Avoidance and Resource Recovery Strategy (WARR Strategy) is the primary strategy for waste prevention, avoidance, re-use and recycling in NSW. The WARR Strategy 2014–21 includes a NSW Government commitment to improve collection services (such as establishing permanent collection points).
The strategy incorporates a commitment to support community drop off centres to make it easier for people to recycle and to remove problems (such as paint, batteries and oils) from household bins.

### 3 Why do councils need a community sharps guideline?

Inappropriate disposal of community sharps may pose a health and safety risk to the public, council employees, waste contractors, and resource recovery operators involved with municipal waste and recycling.

While the risk of infection - such as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or hepatitis B or C - following a needle stick injury is very low, any needle stick injury potentially exposes the person to the risk of acquiring a blood-borne virus. This can cause anxiety about the possibility of contracting an infection.

Well managed community sharps where people have reasonable access to safe disposal facilities can contribute to the health and safety of communities and prevent the transmission of blood-borne viruses by improving access to public health programs such as the Needle and Syringe Program.

#### 3.1 Who generates community sharps?

Community sharps are generated from a number of sources, including:

- people who inject illicit drugs. The NSW Needle and Syringe Program annually distributes approximately 14 million syringes through public outlets and participating pharmacies.
- people with medical conditions that involve regular self-injection in the home. These conditions include diabetes, multiple sclerosis, renal failure, infertility, allergies and vitamin deficiencies. Insulin treatment for diabetes accounts for a large proportion of community sharps, with the number of Australian adults with diabetes increasing rapidly in the past 20 years.
- vaccination and medical procedures for livestock and pets.

#### 3.2 What are the barriers to safe disposal?

In a survey by Diabetes NSW (2015 Evaluation of Sharps Disposal Practices), people with diabetes and diabetes educators identified the following barriers to safe disposal:

- Lack of information about safe sharps disposal or how to access local disposal services
• Issues with disposal facilities - limited opening hours, lack of parking and access for people with limited mobility, distance issues, lack of privacy
• Local pharmacy not providing sharps disposal service

3.3 Where are community sharps deposited?

Residential property
Well-publicised and accessible disposal facilities - particularly for larger sharps disposal containers – will reduce community sharps generated in homes being discarded in local council waste and recycling services.

The Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for Sharps discarded on social housing common property. The response to sharps management varies across sites. The Housing Contact Centre offers a 24-hour phone service where tenants can report inappropriately disposed community sharps on 1800 422 322, option 1, maintenance.

Public places
Used needles and syringes are occasionally found in public spaces such as parks and footpaths. The NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline (1800 633 353 or 1800 NEEDLE) coordinates responses to community concerns regarding inappropriately disposed sharps in public places. Most councils and local NSPs also respond to reports from the public about community sharps in public places.

Commercial premises
Community sharps may be generated and/or disposed of in commercial premises. In particular, businesses in the hospitality, entertainment, retail and sex industries are likely to experience issues with community sharps.

Community sharps disposal bins
Community sharps disposal bins incorporating a strong and secure housing and an internal sharps container are a practical and appropriate disposal option in public locations. Bins that are accessible 24 hours a day can provide anonymity for people disposing sharps.

Several manufacturers supply disposal bins ranging in size from small wall-mounted units for single syringe disposal, to larger 240-litre units that can accept personal use containers of up to 7.8 litres.

Community sharps that have been deposited in designated sharps waste bins and containers must be managed as sharps waste and consigned only to waste processing facilities or waste disposal facilities that are licensed to receive sharps waste.
While it is always best to dispose of community sharps in a designated sharps waste container, it is not illegal to place sharps in domestic waste.

4 Roles and responsibilities

Councils, Local Health Districts, government and some non-government organisations all have a role in providing an effective disposal infrastructure and in encouraging safe disposal.

4.1 State government

State governments are responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating public health and waste management policies. This may range from developing legislation to delivering or administering services.

The NSW Ministry of Health has a demonstrated commitment to the management of community sharps through:

- Supporting the Community Sharps Management program which provides advice to councils on disposal issues and resources to improve the management of community sharps
- Providing community sharps disposal equipment and facilities for people who inject drugs through the NSW Needle and Syringe Program and participating pharmacy sites
- The NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline 1800 633 353 or 1800 NEEDLE coordinates responses to community concerns regarding inappropriately disposed needle and syringes in public places
- Developing a TAFE course to educate and train council employees and community groups on safe sharps handling
- Facilitating access to sharps containers for councils at the state contract price

Local Health Districts 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
- Providing community sharps disposal services and facilities at public hospitals and Community Health Centres
- Responding to NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline calls and organising self-initiated clean ups through the local Needle and Syringe Program.

Other government agencies that collect and dispose of community sharps, such as Transport NSW and the Roads and Maritime Services, have Safe Work Method Statements and workplace policies.
4.2 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 waste management and parks and garden staff, and for ensuring the safety of those who use public spaces that are under council management.

Inappropriately discarded community sharps pose potential workplace and public health risks. Councils may also be liable for needle stick injuries to their employees and, in some circumstances, contractors and the public.

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.

4.3 Medical technology industry

The Medical Technology Association of Australia is the national association representing companies in the medical technology industry, including the major manufacturers and suppliers of injecting equipment in NSW. While suppliers and manufacturers recognise the need for a responsible community-based approach to safe disposal of community sharps, the industry believes manufacturers have limited capacity to influence disposal of their products in community settings.

Other stakeholders believe that manufacturers could support the appropriate disposal of community sharps by raising customer awareness and education of disposal options, or by supporting existing education efforts.

4.4 The community

Members of the community who use injecting equipment have a responsibility to dispose of their equipment safely. However, some people who self-inject to treat a medical condition may not believe that their equipment represents a risk to others. Consequently, they may think that safe disposal information does not apply to them. They also may not know where to deposit their sharps or have limited understanding of workplace health and safety and public safety reasons for disposing of community sharps safely.

4.5 Waste and recycling contractors

Waste and recycling contractors are regularly exposed to risk from community sharps. Most councils outsource their municipal waste and domestic recycling services. Councils and contractors alike are obligated to ensure the health and
safety of the contractor’s employees while engaged in these contractual activities.

Privately owned or operated waste transfer stations, landfills and material recovery facilities may receive waste or recyclables from several different council areas or regions. This can make accurate identification of the origin of loads contaminated with community sharps difficult, if not impossible. This may increase the risk of injuries to workers or result in costly downtime.

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 provide appropriate disposal options.

4.6 Local businesses

Many businesses (including hotels, restaurants, service stations, shopping centres and entertainment venues) are concerned about the cost and inconvenience of removing inappropriately discarded injecting equipment in or near their premises. They are also concerned about the safety and security of their staff and customers as well as the general image of their local environment.

Councils share a common interest with businesses to ensure that residents, visitors and workers can enjoy the amenity of public space. Although under no specific legal obligation to do so, councils may choose to help traders maintain safe work places for their employees and provide a safe environment for their customers.

4.7 Community, business and services partnerships

Councils can partner with local businesses and services to improve their community amenities and maintain safe environments for customers and staff.

Partnering with local businesses and services has potential benefits of:
- providing a service to customers
- demonstrating community support and environmental responsibility
- helping the business meet their own workplace health and safety responsibilities
- enhancing business opportunities

Councils can work collaboratively with:
- Non-government organisations (Like Diabetes NSW, NSW Users and AIDS Association, and Multiple Sclerosis Society)
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
Community Sharps Management

- People with diabetes and their health care workers
- People who inject illicit drugs (through the Local Health District and drug user support agencies)
- Local businesses, waste and recycling contractors
- Government agencies including Family and Community Services Housing Services
- Pharmacies

**Council feedback**

*This project has provided the opportunity for the development of a valuable partnership between health and council staff which otherwise may not have occurred. The broad community support for the project has been rewarding.*

*Kempsey Shire Council*

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5  **Managing community sharps**

5.1  **Preventing accidental injury and re-use of community sharps**

To prevent accidental injury or re-use of inappropriate discarded community sharps, it is important that community sharps are effectively managed.

**Councils can contribute to this by:**

- Reducing the number of community sharps present in the workplace and public places by providing (and promoting) appropriate disposal options
- Ensuring employees and contractors have appropriate knowledge, training and equipment to safely undertake their workplace activities
- Raising community awareness on safe sharps disposal

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.

**Council feedback**

*The training was awesome and nearly all Council staff participated with outstanding numbers engaged in the training*

*Walgett Shire Council*
5.2 Setting up a community sharps management plan

Inappropriate disposal of community sharps may indicate the need for a more coordinated and flexible approach to community sharps disposal. A community sharps management plan can identify ways to:

- Discourage community sharps being disposed of in household bins
- Manage community sharps that are inappropriately disposed in public places
- Managing community sharps that arise in waste collections

The plan should operate in the context of state and federal legislation, as well as council’s own policies and should include:

- A statement about the organisation’s commitment to managing community sharps (for example, a policy on community sharps management)
- Documented risk management process and related procedures (complying with the provisions of the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation)
- Links to waste management strategies
- An outline of effective partnerships with other stakeholders
- Details of accessible and affordable community sharps disposal options
- Community sharps awareness raising strategies on safe disposal practices and facilities
- A documented process for regular performance monitoring and review.

Consult

Community consultation and having key stakeholders, such as Local Health Districts, diabetes educators, health professionals, police and business people, on an advisory committee can help council understand community disposal requirements. Community consultation will also provide access to information about injecting hotspots and issues around unsafe disposal.

Other data can provide valuable context (for example, National Diabetes Services Scheme and Pharmacy Fitpack® Scheme pharmacy distribution figures) for people with diabetes.

Implement

When implementing the management plan, councils need to exercise due diligence and choose the appropriate means.

Strategies could include:

- Providing sharps disposal bins in bathrooms and other locations
- Removing community sharps litter
- Providing appropriate collection equipment (such as, pick-up reachers)
- Providing suitable personal protective equipment
Community Sharps Management

- Arranging transport of sharps waste by a licensed contractor

Educate

Negative reactions to community sharps management may come from a lack of knowledge about the benefits of a proactive approach. Providing facilities for safe disposal of community sharps may be seen by some as encouraging illegal activities. It is critical that councils and their partners are guided by research, consultation and evidence in their approach to managing community sharps disposal and educating their community.

Community education strategies could include:
- Publishing media releases in local press, including Aboriginal and community media
- Broadcasting community service messages on local radio and publishing articles in the council newsletter, website and social media platforms
- Promoting the location of community sharps bins and publishing the Safe Sharps website address (www.safesharps.org.au)
- Providing information on important websites and newsletters (for example, Diabetes NSW, pharmacies, Local Health Districts, Needle and Syringe Program outlets, Aboriginal Medical Services and healthcare providers)
- Advising residents about how to report syringe litter
- Promoting the NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline number 1800 633 353 or 1800 NEEDLE

To help councils educate the community, the Ministry of Health provides sample artwork and print instructions for flyers, media releases and letters about community sharps for download. Sample artwork for sharps disposal bins or wheelie bins can also be downloaded at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/csm/Pages/promotional-materials.aspx

Monitor and review

Consulting with the local Needle and Syringe Program or community health centre 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
- Recording maintenance of community sharps bins in a Community Sharps Bin Register
- Identifying local hotspots and performing regular needle and syringe sweeps of public places under council management
Keeping an incident report database

Moree Plains Shire Council community sharps management program
Moree Plains Shire Council introduced a comprehensive community sharps management program and within 12 months reported these outcomes:
- The number of inappropriately discarded sharps dramatically reduced
- The sharps collected from strategically placed collection bins increased greatly which proves they are being utilised correctly
- Community members are aware of the locations of the collection bins
- Council continue to support other agencies with clean-up activities and educational material
- Council staff are much more confident when dealing with the collection of inappropriately disposed sharps.
6 Resources

Community Sharps Management program website

Safe disposal brochure template for adaptation by individual councils

Promotional materials
Samples of flyers, media and sticker templates for download

Training
Information on community sharps handling training

Council - developed resources
Examples of resources developed by other NSW councils

NSW Government, NSW legislation, Public Health Regulation 2012

SafeWork NSW

NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline: 1800 633 353 or 1800 NEEDLE

Locations of community sharps disposal bins across NSW
www.safesharps.org.au

NSW Needle and Syringe Program Guideline GL2017_024

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1 Ministry of Health NSW, Needle and Syringe Minimum Dataset, 2016
2 Diabetes NSW, Evaluation of Sharps Disposal Practices, 2015