



September 26, 2012

Riverside County

NEWS RELEASE

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County waste management department provides free safe sharps and needle disposal to residents

Needles, lancets, sharps - not even those who need them want to get stuck by them. Waste workers who handle trash, repair equipment, work at landfills, and sorters that separate recyclable materials like plastic, paper, metal and glass, can be exposed to unnecessary needle sticks from sharps (needles, syringes, and lancets) that are disposed of improperly and hidden in trash and recyclables.

Waste workers are at risk of contracting infections from blood borne pathogens, like HIV and hepatitis, from used needles that are placed in curbside recycling and trash containers. Trash trucks collect neighborhood waste and compact it in the truck where sharps containers can be crushed or burst open, spilling the used needles throughout the load.

State law makes it illegal to dispose of home-generated sharps waste in the trash or recycling containers, and requires that all sharps waste be transported to a collection center in a sharps container approved by the local enforcement agency or through an approved mail back program.

The Riverside County Waste Management Department operates the household hazardous waste collection program that provides free disposal of needles, lancets, and sharps for county residents. This program gives county residents an affordable option to dispose of sharps waste properly at no cost.

Home-generated sharps must be transported in an approved sharps container. The department provides instructions on how to make a low cost approved sharps container on its website, <http://www.rivcowm.org/opencms/hhw/pdf/88751-Biohazard-labels.PDF>. The site describes how to download special biohazard labels and attach them to hard-sided plastic laundry detergent bottles. Following these easy steps can save residents from having to purchase an approved sharps container that can cost from \$4 to \$50 retail. Preprinted labels are also available directly from the department.

Mail-back containers can be purchased at pharmacies or through a medical supplier and may be more convenient to residents that cannot bring sharps to the household hazardous waste program. In addition, some cities have sharps disposal programs for their residents.

Please protect waste and recycling workers, fellow residents, and the environment from the unlawful disposal of sharps. Take the necessary steps to dispose of unwanted sharps and needle waste properly.

For more information on the proper disposal of medications and sharps in Riverside County, contact the Riverside County Waste Management Department at (951) 486-3200 or (800) 304-2226, or www.rivcowm.org.