



## WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

### Solid Waste Program – Biomedical Waste

509 Girard Street

Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: (360) 778-6000 Fax: (360) 778-6001

[www.whatcomcounty.us/health](http://www.whatcomcounty.us/health) - [Environmentalhealth@whatcomcounty.us](mailto:Environmentalhealth@whatcomcounty.us)

Biomedical waste is waste such as sharps, blood and cultures that can potentially cause infection. Improper disposal of biomedical waste can lead to the transmission of infectious agents. Due to the risks that these wastes present, the wastes are regulated under [Whatcom County Code \(WCC\) Chapter 24.06](#).

#### **Biomedical Waste Regulations and what you need to know as a biomedical waste generator:**

After reading this information, you will have a better understanding of how the revised regulations affect you. The revisions to the Solid Waste Rules were made to protect workers, families, and the public health of our community from the transmission of infectious agents in the biomedical waste stream. This information is part of an outreach program by Whatcom County Health Department to educate biomedical waste generators about the revisions to WCC 24.06, which include requirements for biomedical waste handling.

#### **Background**

- In response to community concerns regarding the handling and treatment of biomedical waste, a Biomedical Waste Community Task Force was established in October of 1998.
- Out of the Task Force came many recommendations for the generation, handling, storage, treatment, transportation, and disposal of biomedical waste.
- These recommendations were used as the basis for the revision of WCC 24.06 Solid Waste Rules.
- Previously, there were no specific regulations for biomedical waste and it could legally be handled the same as municipal solid waste (MSW).
- The rule revision, approved by the Whatcom County Council, became effective on May 30, 2000 and specific requirements for all aspects of biomedical waste management.

#### **Definitions**

- Generator: Any producer of biomedical waste.
- Biomedical waste:
  - Animal waste; Carcasses, body parts, etc. that have been inoculated with microorganisms infectious to humans.
  - Human blood and blood products: Waste blood materials containing free-flowing blood.
  - Cultures and stocks: Culture dishes, blood specimen tubes, devices used to transfer, inoculate, and mix cultures that are infectious to humans.
  - Pathological waste: Tissue coming from biopsies, surgery, obstetrical procedures or autopsies.
  - Sharps waste: All hypodermic needles, syringes and IV tubing with needles attached, scalpel blades and lancets.
  - Respiratory isolation waste: Waste contaminated with blood or potentially infectious bodily fluids from humans isolated for disease spread by respiratory or droplet transmission (i.e. pulmonary suction canisters, gowns, masks, and other articles that may have been contaminated).

#### **General Requirements**

- Biomedical waste must be segregated from other MSW at the point of generation.
- Biomedical waste must be treated prior to disposal into the MSW stream.
- Respiratory isolation waste must be treated prior to disposal into the MSW stream.
- Stocks and cultures containing microorganisms that may be transmitted to humans via airborne droplet nuclei must be treated on-site prior to transportation off-site (i.e. tuberculosis, measles, and varicella).

- A biomedical waste generator that treats biomedical waste on-site must obtain a permit from the Health Department.

### **Containment and Handling of Biomedical Waste**

- Untreated biomedical waste cannot be compacted, ground or shredded.
- Biomedical waste and respiratory isolation waste need to be packaged in containers that are approved by the Department of Transportation:
  - a. The medical waste must be placed in a red plastic disposable bag clearly labeled with the word 'BIOHAZARD' and the biohazard symbol. These bags must be resistant to moisture and have strength sufficient to keep from ripping, tearing, or spilling the contents. The bags shall be securely sealed to prevent leakage or spilling.
  - b. Bags containing biomedical waste will be placed in a rigid container, including a corrugated cardboard container or a covered reusable container. The rigid container shall be labeled with a visible biohazard symbol and the word 'BIOHAZARD'.
- Sharps shall be contained in rigid, puncture resistant, leak proof containers made of materials such as metal or plastic, designed to prevent the loss of the contents. This container must be labeled clearly with a visible biohazard symbol and the words 'BIOHAZARD' and 'SHARPS'.



### **Exemptions**

- Biomedical waste generated from self-treatment and disposed of with residential waste from a single family residence are exempt from these requirements.
- A biomedical waste generator may be granted an exemption from the permitting requirements if all of the following are met:
  - a. Less than 50 pounds of biomedical waste are treated per month.
  - b. A biomedical waste treatment plan is submitted to the Health Department.
  - c. Generator registration is obtained from the Health Department after the treatment plan is approved.
  - d. Treated sharps waste is delivered to a permitted solid waste transfer station and not disposed of in the MSW stream.
  - e. Exempt biomedical waste generators may only treat waste generated on-site.
  - f. Biomedical waste generators transporting less than 100 pounds per month of biomedical waste are exempt from transportation requirements. However, all biomedical waste must be transported to a facility permitted to accept biomedical waste.