Home-Generated Sharps and Pharmaceutical Waste

By Designating a Lead Agency, the State Could Increase Proper Disposal

**Background**

Californians use and obtain hundreds of millions of sharps—syringes and other devices used to penetrate the skin to deliver medication—and prescription medications. Improperly disposing of home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste can potentially pose health, safety, and environmental risks.

**Our Key Recommendations**

The Legislature should consider the following changes:

- Of the four state agencies involved in overseeing or regulating home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste, assign the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) as the lead state agency with oversight responsibilities over the proper disposal of home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste.

- As part of CalRecycle’s responsibilities, require it to implement a public education campaign and maintain an up-to-date and well publicized list of collection sites.

**Key Findings**

- The State’s oversight of home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste is fragmented.
  - Consumers receive inconsistent messages for proper disposal methods of this waste from state and federal agencies—some that directly contradict each other.
  - Sharps waste is classified differently depending on where consumers dispose of it and several government agencies oversee its disposal, depending on the disposal method.
  - There is no defined regulatory framework for home-generated pharmaceutical waste.

- Most consumers in urban areas have reasonable access to disposal sites for home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste but may not be aware of these locations because the State does not communicate accessible, reliable information.
  - Eighty-nine percent of Californians live within a 20-minute drive of free collection sites, but those in less-populated areas do not live reasonably close to such sites.
  - Although two agencies publish lists of statewide collection sites on their websites, the lists are not up-to-date, readily accessible, or user-friendly.

- The State does not have comprehensive and reliable data on the amount of home-generated sharps and pharmaceutical waste that consumers generate or how they dispose of it.

- Although the State has sufficient capacity to process a significant increase in sharps or pharmaceutical waste, one type of waste is mostly disposed of out of state—government recommendations and legal requirements discourage in-state incinerators from accepting pharmaceutical waste.

**Access to Sharps and Pharmaceutical Waste Collection Sites Varies Based on the Driving Time Considered**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area Radius (in Minutes of Drive Time)</th>
<th>Sharps Population</th>
<th>Sharps Percentage</th>
<th>Pharmaceutical Population</th>
<th>Pharmaceutical Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>27,300,000</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<td>34,600,000</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<td>95%</td>
<td>35,700,000</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<td>36,700,000</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>36,300,000</td>
<td>95%</td>
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</tbody>
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