



# **WHITEPAPER:**

## Medical Waste Segregation

# Background

With proper planning, you can avoid the three most common consequences of compliance errors.

Facilities that generate biomedical waste—such as healthcare and veterinary facilities, as well as funeral homes, tattoo parlours, dentists' offices, many research labs and more—are generally aware of the need to properly dispose of sharps and other medical waste.

But did you know that, even though they're aware of the need for proper waste disposal, the majority of Canadian healthcare facilities don't handle their regulated medical waste (RMW) and other waste correctly?

Part of the confusion stems from the fact that healthcare facilities face an intricate regulatory landscape—provincial standards and regulations govern some types of waste, while federal regulations apply to others. Because of this complexity, most facilities dispose of their waste in ways that range from being simply inefficient and expensive to being in violation of provincial or federal laws.

Regardless of the reasons for improper disposal, the potential consequences to your facility can include:

1. Unnecessarily high disposal costs
2. Diversion of controlled substances such as narcotics
3. An increased risk of fines and liability

This whitepaper will help you determine if your facility is handling waste compliantly and effectively, and offers some insights into how to correct any issues you may be having.



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# Issues Arising from Non-Compliance

## 1. Non-compliance can lead to unnecessarily high disposal costs.

Disposing of RMW is more expensive than “standard” waste, so it’s in your best interest to understand how to segregate your waste properly and ensure that your staff follow a clear, safe process.

The first step is to assess what type of waste your facility generates. Your waste disposal provider should be able to help you conduct an audit to examine your waste streams and determine the different types of wastes you generate. From there, your facility will need to complete a waste management plan that includes an easy-to-understand protocol to avoid cross-contamination of the different waste streams.

In many facilities, we see examples of employees trying to “err on the side of caution” and toss all waste—from coffee cups to pizza boxes—into RMW collection containers. These non-RMW items drive up your waste removal costs unnecessarily. As part of a complete waste management program, your waste disposal provider should be able to help you train your staff to understand what needs to be collected as RMW, and, just as importantly, what doesn’t.

*Your waste disposal provider should be able to help you train your staff to understand what needs to be collected as RMW—and what doesn’t.*

## 2. Non-compliance can increase the chances of diversion of controlled substances, such as narcotics.

The illicit use of narcotic drugs has been on the increase in Canada in recent years, and with this increase comes a corresponding tightening of regulatory scrutiny of the proper medical use and disposal of these drugs.

When you consider that up to four percent of hospital waste contains narcotics (generally composed of drugs that have been dispensed but not completely used), the possibilities for diversion are many.

A proper narcotics disposal process includes full accountability for all doses of narcotics, in which doses dispensed but not used are returned to the pharmacy for destruction. In Canada, two methods of narcotics destruction are allowed:

- Incineration, which destroys the drug
- Denaturing, which alters the substance in a way that makes it impossible to reuse

If your facility does not have a compliant narcotics disposal process in place, there’s an increased chance that any unused doses can be diverted from the facility, and then used or sold in your community—with the result that your facility could be found to be in violation of Health Canada’s Controlled Substances Act.

Work with a waste services provider that offers a complete, single-source solution for pharmaceutical waste disposal. Your provider should offer the comprehensive training your facility needs to have staff properly characterize, segregate, transport and dispose of all pharmaceutical materials, from narcotics to cytotoxic waste to antibiotics.

# Issues Arising from Non-Compliance

## 3. Non-compliance can lead to an increased risk of fines and liability.

You're probably aware that your facility can be fined for the improper disposal of various types of waste. But did you know that if waste isn't segregated into the proper disposal streams and properly packaged, or if you give your medical waste to a disposer who isn't appropriately licensed, you could be putting people at risk—your staff, your waste removal provider, or your community—and that your facility could be held liable if an accident occurred?

You and your staff are the only ones who know the exact nature of what you're throwing out, which means that your waste is your responsibility.

As only one example, if you or your staff disposes of flammable materials or aerosol cans in the same containers designated as "pharmaceutical waste":

- Your waste removal provider can be unknowingly exposed to an explosion risk if the container is crushed or shredded
- First responders could be exposed to an explosion risk if the waste removal provider gets into a traffic accident

Proper segregation and recording of medical waste protects everyone who comes in contact with it.

Your waste removal provider should be able to:

- Help you conduct an audit to understand your waste streams
- Offer container recommendations, such as a range of disposable and reusable containers that are colour-coded for a user-friendly disposal process
- Offer proper signage
- Advise on the best processes for the unique needs of your facility
- Provide regulatory consultation and staff training



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# Conclusion

## Navigating the Intricacies of Waste

The regulations associated with various biohazards and pharmaceutical waste disposal are intricate, vary by provincial and local requirements, and are managed by several government departments, including:

- Transport Canada
- Environment Canada
- Canada Labour Code and provincial labour ministries
- Provincial environment ministries
- Health Canada

Having a comprehensive waste management plan helps you improve the safety of your facility and your community, lower your liability risks and save your facility money.

Choose a provider that can help you navigate the guidelines, standards and regulations for handling regulated medical waste—as well as help train your staff on all areas of compliance.



This whitepaper has been prepared by Stericycle Canada. As the leading global provider of medical waste disposal services, Stericycle assists acute care facilities with complete pharmaceutical waste consulting and reviews. Our experts provide regulatory overviews, situational analysis, and site audits to determine proper containers for each Rx waste collection area in pharmacies and in patient care areas. We also handle all aspects of the transportation, treatment and disposal of the hazardous and non-hazardous Rx waste generated. We provide replacement of the approved shipping containers as well as complete documentation and tracking of the waste.

To find out more, visit [www.stericycle.ca/RMWcompliance](http://www.stericycle.ca/RMWcompliance)