

# Don't trash med waste

Since Sept. 1, a new state law has made it illegal to throw away hypodermic needles — or “sharps” — in household or public trash.

With the Medical Waste Management Act, California becomes one of the first states in the nation to ban sharps from the residential waste system, including containers used for collecting solid waste, construction and demolition debris, green waste or other recyclable materials. The act also prohibits discarding sharps in public places, such as parks, buildings or streets.

The new law is important for the safety of all solid waste management employees, as well as our environmental health. But what does this mean to individuals who use sharps regularly for their health care?

To comply with the new regulations, just follow these three simple steps:

- Obtain a sharps container from your local pharmacy or household hazardous waste (HHW) facility.

- Discard all used or exposed needles, syringes and lancets in an approved sharps container.



RECYCLING  
Alan Styles

- Dispose of the sharps container at an approved drop-off location when 3/4 full.

In Monterey County, several pharmacies and household hazardous waste (HHW) facilities accept sharps containers at no cost and dispose of them as required by law. Authorized HHW facilities include Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority's HHW Facility at 139 Sun St. in Salinas and the Johnson Canyon HHW Facility in Gonzales.

Prescription drugs are also a growing concern in the handling of waste. They should not be disposed of in recycling receptacles. Traces of common medications have been detected in

local creeks and streams, which is partially a result of flushing medications down the sink or toilet. So whatever you do, don't flush unused medications (or used sharps)!

The preferred method of disposal is to return unused portions of prescriptions and over-the-counter medications to participating pharmacies and HHW facilities, but you may also mix these items with dirt, kitty litter, coffee grounds or other absorbent material, and dispose of them in the trash. More disposal information can be found at .

For more information about participating pharmacies and HHW facilities, check the Monterey County Recycling guide in the Yellow Pages, or visit .

ALAN STYLES is recycling coordinator for the Salinas Valley Solid Waste Authority. His column appears the third Friday of the month in Central Coast Living.

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