

Disposal of Household Sharps

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Issue

Does Connecticut law address the disposal of “household sharps” (i.e., hypodermic needles, syringes, and lancets) used by individuals outside of health care settings? Do other states have laws addressing this issue?

Summary

Connecticut law does not address the collection and disposal of used household sharps. The Department of Consumer Protection administers a [program](#) that allows the public to drop off unwanted prescription drugs anonymously at participating local police stations, but these collection sites do not accept used household sharps. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEEP) has an [online brochure](#) with information on how to properly dispose of these items. DEEP recommends that people check with their supplier (i.e., physician, hospital, or pharmacy) to see if they would take back properly packaged sharps.

We found several states, such as California, Idaho, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, and Wisconsin that have laws addressing this issue. Generally, these states prohibit the disposal of household sharps in the trash or recycling containers and instead require individuals to dispose of them at designated collection centers in approved collection containers. We describe the California, Massachusetts, and New York laws below.

Examples of Other States' Household Sharps Laws

California

California law makes it illegal to dispose of household sharps in the trash or recycling containers and instead requires individuals to dispose of them at designated collection centers, which generally include household hazardous waste and medical waste facilities as well as other collection sites (e.g., pharmacies and hospitals) approved by local enforcement agencies (LEAs). Sharps must be disposed of in LEA-approved containers and may be mailed back to medical waste facilities using a container approved by the U.S. Postal Service ([Cal. Health and Safety Code § 118286](#)).

Massachusetts

Massachusetts law and regulation has banned the disposal of household sharps in the trash or recycling containers since 2012. The state enacted its Pharmacy Access Law in 2006 to comply with federal Environmental Protection Agency [guidance](#) that recommends individuals no longer dispose of household sharps in this manner. The law requires individuals to dispose of household sharps at designated local collection sites using approved containers. The Department of Public Health maintains a list of these collection sites on its website. [Guidelines](#) for such disposal vary among local sites, but generally require sharps to be placed into a rigid, puncture-resistant, sealed, leak-proof container before disposing them ([Mass. Gen. Laws ch. 94C, §27A](#) and [105 CMR § 480.00](#)).

New York

New York law requires hospitals and nursing homes to collect and safely dispose of used household sharps, provided the person deposited the sharps in an approved puncture-proof container ([NYS Public Health Law, § 1389dd\(4\)](#)). Such containers include (1) commercially available sharps containers, known as “red biohazard boxes” or (2) appropriately labeled leak-proof, puncture resistant containers, such as laundry detergent or bleach bottles. The law does not require anyone who disposes of household sharps at a participating site to provide any identification.

In addition to hospitals and nursing homes, various pharmacies, health care providers, and other entities voluntarily participate in the state’s collection program. The state Department of Public Health (DPH) maintains an [online directory](#) of participating nursing homes, hospitals, and alternative collection sites.

The law requires the DPH commissioner to promulgate rules and regulations setting guidelines for facilities participating in the program. According to the [guidelines](#), because nursing homes and

hospitals vary in their resources and physical environment, DPH did not adopt specific, universal requirements. Instead, DPH encourages facilities to review and renew their household sharps programs and recommends that the programs are:

1. convenient, accessible, and easy to use;
2. promoted to the community;
3. understood and supported by staff;
4. safe and secure; and
5. monitored and improved (DPH “[Guidelines for Hospital and Nursing Home Sharps Collection and Safe Disposal Programs](#)”).

To help facilities do this, DPH developed a [checklist](#) of basic program elements, features of model programs, and templates.

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