

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

FEBRUARY 4, 1993

Helen L. Heim
The City of San Diego
Waste Management Department
Services Division
4950 Murphy Canyon Road
San Diego, CA 92123-4325

Dear Ms. Heim:

Thank you for your letter concerning our educational booklet Handle With Care: How To Throw out Used Insulin Syringes And Lancets At Home. The purpose of this booklet is to identify safe disposal practices for sharps generated by the home user, the majority of whom are insulin dependent diabetics. As you know, the disposal of sharps from the home setting has caused concern due to potential physical and infection hazards for waste handlers as well as the general public.

Your concern with the booklet is that there appears to be a discrepancy between the "Do's" and the "Don'ts" for containers as they apply to recycling. While the Agency does not endorse one type of sharp container over another, the Agency does recommend to home care users of sharps that they contain used needles and syringes as best they can. In the "Do's" section of the booklet we recommend the use of containers made of strong plastic so that the needles cannot puncture the sides. As you stated in your letter, many of these containers are made of recyclable materials. In our "Don'ts" section we state that containers "that will be returned to the store or recycled" should not be used, as "syringes and lancets can't be recycled". The intent of this statement is to indicate that containers holding needles and syringes can no longer be recycled and therefore should not be placed in the recycling stream. The intent is not to avoid materials that have the potential to be recycled, but to avoid putting them in the recycling stream once used.

This booklet was developed pursuant to the Medical Waste Tracking Act of 1988 (42 U.S.C. 6992 et seq.) This program was a two-year demonstration program which ended in June, 1991. As such, EPA will not be revising the booklet at this time. However, EPA's Final Report to Congress on Medical Waste Management in the United States, due out later this year, will discuss home medical waste generation and disposal. The report will discuss safe management practices for home generated sharps to include types of containers suitable for holding sharps. Suggestions will be given for clear and recognizable labeling of such containers so that they do not end up in the recycling stream.

Thank you for raising these issues with us. We appreciate your concern and interest in proper medical waste management. Should you have any further suggestion, please call Michaelle Wilson, Chief, Special Programs Section at (202) 260-4669.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Lowrance, Director
Office of Solid Waste