

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

OCTOBER 5, 1993

Ms. Elizabeth H. Karter
President
Resource Recovery Systems, Inc.
36 Plains Road
Essex, Connecticut 06426-1501

Dear Ms. Karter:

Thank you for your letter of July 7, 1993, concerning needlestick injuries in the recycling industry. In your letter you state that our brochure, Disposal Tips for Home Health Care, leads to over 20 accidents per year in your company. You specifically recommended that EPA more strongly emphasize in this brochure that containers in which used needles are stored should be placed in the trash instead of with recyclables.

We share your concerns about injuries to workers from improperly packaged needles in the recycling stream. We plan to address these concerns in a reprint of Disposal Tips for Home Health Care by highlighting more prominently that needles and other medical waste should not be placed in the recycling stream. We expect the new version to be ready for distribution within the next two months.

As you may be aware, individual States have produced outreach materials to address the issue of household generated medical waste to include recommendations aimed at protection of waste handlers, recycling workers, and the public. Educational efforts of other associations involved in home health care should also aid in minimizing the number of sharps entering the recycling stream.

In addition to your comments on sharps in the recycling stream, you mention in your letter that we should also recommend breaking off the tips of needles to protect waste handlers. EPA does not recommend this practice as breaking the needle does not necessarily eliminate the puncture capability of the needle and does increase the chance that pathogens potentially on the needle could be aerosolized and inhaled.

I thank you for raising these issues with us, and appreciate your interest in the safe management of medical waste. If you have any questions, please contact Kristina Meson of my staff at (202) 260-8551.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey D. Denit Acting Director
Office of Solid of Waste

FaxBack # 11778

