

TAFE STATEMENT IN SAFE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL OF COMMUNITY SHARPS

EXAMPLE OF AN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY OPERATING PROCEDURE & SAFE WORK METHOD STATEMENT

Note: This example of an OHS Procedure & SWMS for the safe handling of sharps is not designed or promoted as a “best practice” model for universal application. It is intended to be used only as a general guide to assist in the development of an appropriate document that will be suitable for the specific OHS requirements of individual councils. Councils referencing this document do so on the understanding that it has not been reviewed or endorsed by WorkCover NSW, and TAFE NSW makes no claims as to its compliance with all relevant legislation.

1. OBJECTIVE

- a. This procedure has been developed to protect workforce members (including employees, volunteers and contractors) that may come into contact with **sharps waste** or **community sharps** in the workplace (collectively called sharps in this procedure).
- b. It is designed to assist XXX City/Shire Council to meet the requirements of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000*, and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001*, by providing safe systems of work for its employees.

2. SCOPE

- a. This procedure applies to all council workforce members at all workplaces in the XXX City/Shire Council local government area where they may come into contact with sharps and be exposed to the possibility of injury. Council vehicles used to store and transport sharps for later disposal are workplaces for the purposes of this policy.

3. DEFINITIONS

Body substances means any human bodily secretion, excluding sweat, or substance other than blood.

Community sharps are sharps that have been generated by non-clinical activities. This includes needles, syringes and lancets used by people with diabetes and other medical conditions requiring self-injection in the home, syringes used by injecting drug users in the home or public places, and syringes used for animal healthcare by pet and livestock owners.

Sharps means anything:

- That has sharp points or edges capable of cutting, piercing or penetrating the skin (such as needles, syringes with needles or surgical instruments)
- that are designed for the purpose of cutting, piercing or penetrating the skin
- that has the potential to cause injury or infection

Sharps waste means any waste collected from designated sharps waste containers during business, commercial or community service activities, being waste resulting from the use of sharps for any of the following purposes:

- human health care by health professionals and other health care providers
- medical research or work on cadavers
- veterinary care or veterinary research
- skin penetration or the injection of drugs or other substances for medical or non-medical reasons

Workforce members are defined as employees, volunteers or contractors of XXX City/Shire Council.

Workplace is defined as any building, vehicle or location where a workforce member is carrying out the normal undertakings of XXX City/Shire Council.

4. BACKGROUND

Sharps and other potentially infectious wastes are generated through a wide range of work and private activities. They can be present in many different situations, including residential and commercial premises, health care facilities, and public places. In workplaces where workforce members may be exposed to blood and body substances there is potential for transmission of blood borne viruses such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. Transmission can occur when a needle, syringe or other sharp contaminated with infected blood penetrates the skin, or when infected blood or body substances enter the eyes, mouth or nose, or contact broken skin such as a cut or abrasion. Tetanus infection is also a risk factor following a needlestick injury, particularly if the needle or syringe has been in contact with soil or dust.

While the risk of acquiring a serious infection as a result of an accidental injury from a sharp in a non-clinical setting is extremely low, the anxiety resulting from such an injury can be significant.

Sharps waste is a type of 'special waste' defined in the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* (POEO Act). The potential environmental impacts of sharps waste need to be managed to minimise the risk of harm to the environment and human health, and there are specific regulatory requirements for the storage, transport and disposal of this waste.

Collection and transport of sharps waste to a disposal facility licensed to accept this material should be undertaken by an operator licensed to transport sharps waste.

Community sharps are specified as 'municipal waste' in the POEO Act and are not classified as either a hazardous waste or a special waste. Most sharps present either in the environment or in council waste and recycling services are community sharps resulting from personal use. As community sharps can cause a penetrating injury they should not be disposed of in Council waste or recycling services. Disposal should occur only through a designated sharps disposal service or facility which has been specifically designed to keep sharps secure and separate from other wastes.

Once community sharps have been placed into a designated sharps waste container such as a Council community sharps disposal bin or pharmacy disposal bin the material is classed as sharps waste and must be managed accordingly.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. Executive and Senior Management
 - i. Executive and senior management will ensure that adequate time, resources and training are available to ensure the effective implementation of this OHS Procedure.
 - ii. Executive and senior management will ensure that the OHS procedure is included in Council's occupational health and management system (OHSMS) and that systems are put into place to ensure the OHS procedure is implemented, monitored and communicated to all workforce members
- b. Managers
 - i. Managers will ensure that workforce members who are directly involved in activities that expose them to sharps, their supervisors/team leaders, and relevant contractors are consulted to identify and assess the risk of sharps hazards in the workplace.

- ii. Managers will ensure that this OHS Procedure is implemented in all workplaces involving the risk of injury from exposure to sharps.
 - iii. Managers will ensure that all workforce members considered at risk of exposure to sharps in the workplace are informed of the potential for transmission of blood born pathogens and have current vaccinations for hepatitis B and tetanus.
 - iv. Managers will ensure that appropriate equipment and resources are available for the safe handling and disposal of sharps.
 - v. Managers will ensure that this OHS Procedure is included in the orientation/induction program for new workforce members who may be exposed to sharps in the workplace.
 - vi. Managers will ensure that any contractor working or providing a service within their area of control complies with this OHS Procedure.
 - vii. Managers will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of this OHS Procedure.
 - viii. Managers will ensure this OHS Procedure is reviewed in conjunction with other sharps management procedures and protocols to ensure consistent and effective application of sharps management systems.
- c. Supervisors/Team Leaders
- i. Supervisors/Team Leaders will ensure that a risk assessment is undertaken prior to any work activity to identify the likelihood of exposure to a sharps hazard, and that appropriate control measures are used to eliminate or minimise the risk of needlestick injury or unprotected contact with blood or body substances.
 - ii. Supervisors/Team Leaders will ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is made available to workforce members under their supervision and that clear instruction in the proper use of this equipment is provided. In the case of volunteers or contractors the supervisor/team leader will ensure all appropriate PPE is worn.
 - iii. Supervisors/Team Leaders will ensure that every workforce member under their supervision follows the requirements of the Safe Work Method Statement when handling sharps in the workplace.
- d. Workforce members (employees/volunteers/contractors)
- Any person required to carry out work where there may be a risk of exposure to sharps must:
- Undertake a risk assessment which includes a daily check for sharps hazards prior to commencing work activity.
 - Be familiar with the requirements of the Safe Work Method Statement.
 - Not attempt to handle sharps unless they have undertaken appropriate training in the safe handling and disposal of sharps and have current vaccinations for hepatitis B and tetanus (if not, report location to Supervisor/Team Leader/Volunteer Coordinator).
 - Work in accordance with the requirements of the Safe Work Method Statement and instructions from their Supervisor
 - Obtain and use equipment as required by the Safe Work Method Statement to safeguard their personal safety and the safety of others.
 - Wear and maintain PPE as required by the Safe Work Method Statement.
 - Advise their Supervisor/Team Leader/Volunteer Coordinator of any defects or repairs required to PPE.

6. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

XXX City/Shire Council workforce members may come across sharps when undertaking a range of activities. Areas where sharps may be encountered include streets, parks, gardens, sports grounds, playgrounds, beaches, waterways, amenities buildings, public buildings, sewers and drains, and waste and recycling services.

It is in the interest of both occupational health and safety and public safety that these items are collected and disposed of safely. **Workforce members must first determine if it is safe for them to attempt to pick up and dispose of sharps.** (If there are any exceptional circumstances they should immediately advise their responsible supervisor/team leader so that appropriate actions can be instigated).

If safe to proceed they should then follow the procedure for safe collection of sharps described in the Safe Work Method Statement. A community sharps disposal bin serviced by a contractor licensed to transport sharps waste must be provided for the safe disposal of sharps collected in the workplace.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK RATING

The *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001* requires that employers must identify foreseeable hazards and assess risks that could harm their employees or any other person in the workplace. This includes activities where skin penetrating injury risks exist. The risk assessment process must include consultation with workforce members who are directly involved in activities that expose them to sharps in the workplace. This consultation will identify the level of exposure to skin penetrating injury risks and the risk of injury and/or infection associated with particular activities and workplaces, and determine measures to control the exposure. The Hazpak Risk Rating included in the Safe Work Method Statement must identify the level of risk for the designated activity, or injury/ incident. The rating is based on a risk assessment table that matches the likelihood of a needlestick injury or blood or body substance exposure occurring with the probable consequences if an injury or infection does result.

8. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES REPORTING AND ISOLATION PROCEDURES

Some instances of sharps litter are of particular concern and must be reported immediately to a manager or supervisor/team leader for action to occur. These circumstances may include damaged or overflowing community sharps disposal bins, large numbers of discarded sharps in a particular location, or areas where safe removal of sharps is not considered possible. In locations where there is a high probability that members of the public, particularly children, may come into contact with the sharps the area should be kept under direct observation, or be locked or barricaded to warn of danger and prevent accidental contact with the sharps until they can be safely removed.

In addition to reporting exceptional circumstances, details of all sharps found in the workplace must be reported by the workforce member on a Community Sharps Report Form. Managers will ensure that this information is collated to allow regular monitoring and review of sharps management procedures.

9. NEEDLESTICK INJURY OR BLOOD/BODY SUBSTANCE CONTACT

All needlestick injuries where the skin is penetrated, or where blood or body substances enters the mouth, nose, eyes or any cuts or abrasions must be reported immediately to the OHS officer, responsible manager, supervisor/team leader or volunteer program coordinator.

The OHS officer or appropriate manager/supervisor/team leader should act quickly to:

- i. Ensure that the injury or exposure has been treated in accordance with the Safe Work Method Statement and other appropriate Council policies and procedures.
- ii. Ensure that the needle, syringe or other sharp that caused the injury has been safely collected for appropriate disposal.
- iii. Ensure that the workforce member is provided with medical advice from a registered health professional as soon as possible. Advice and appropriate risk exposure treatment may be obtained through the Accident and Emergency Department of a public hospital, the employee's own doctor or the Council's nominated doctor.
- iv. **Confidential advice about needlestick injuries or exposure to blood or body substances is also available from the HIV Information Line on 1800 451 600.**
- v. Offer support and trauma counselling through the appropriate agencies.
- vi. Ensure workforce member confidentiality
- vii. Ensure that a workplace injury form has been completed and WorkCover NSW and Council's Workers Compensation insurer have been notified.
- viii. Investigate the circumstances of the injury/contact and take measures to prevent a recurrence (review work practices, equipment and training).
- ix. Report areas which have significant sharps litter issues to the Area Health Service Needle and Syringe Program (NSP), either directly, or by calling the Needle Clean Up Hotline on 1800 633 353.

References for OHS Operating Procedure & Safe Work Method Statement:

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001

Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997

Workcover NSW., Risk Management Code of Practice, 2001

Workcover NSW., *Risk Management at Work Guide*, 2001


Workcover NSW., *Notification Requirements for Occupational Exposure to Human Blood Pathogens Guide 2003*



Workcover NSW., *Hazpak, Making Your Workplace Safer: A Practical Guide to Basic Risk Management*

National Code of Practice for the Control of Work-related Exposure to Hepatitis and HIV (blood-borne) Viruses [NOHSC:2010 (2003)]

AS 4031-1992: *Non-reusable containers for the collection of sharp medical items used in health care areas*

NSW Health., *Community Sharps Management Guidelines for NSW Councils*

<p>Safe Work Method Statement</p>	<p>XXX City/Shire Council</p>
<p>Work Description: Collection, storage and safe disposal of needles, syringes and other sharps</p>	
<p>Department/Location of Work: All workplaces where the workforce member is exposed to sharps. This may include streets, parks, gardens, sports grounds, playgrounds, beaches, waterways, amenities buildings, public buildings, sewers and drains, and waste and recycling services</p>	
<p>Authorised Person/s: Collection, transport and disposal of sharps shall only be undertaken by workforce members who have completed appropriate training in the safe handling of sharps</p>	<p>Supervisor/s: All supervisors/team leaders responsible for workforce members who are directly involved in tasks that expose them to the risk of needlestick injury</p>
<p>Qualifications/Training: Instruction on the SWMS and completion of an appropriate training course on the safe collection and disposal of community sharps</p>	
<p>Tools/Equipment Required: Long reach pick-up tool (<i>include selected make/model</i>) Short reach tool – preferably soft tip (<i>for hard to reach areas</i>) Screw top yellow sharps container (AS4031-1992) (<i>include selected capacity/make/model</i>) Vehicles - sharps container bracket or secure storage unit if mounted externally (<i>include selected make/model</i>) First Aid kit Community sharps report form</p>	
<p>PPE Required: Enclosed footwear (<i>designate steel toe footwear if required</i>) High visibility safety vest or other suitable high visibility clothing that meets the appropriate Australian Standard. Protective gloves (<i>leather or puncture resistant</i>) Disposable gloves and safety glasses (<i>if blood or body substances present</i>)</p>	<p>Maintenance checks: Regular checks of equipment, tools and PPE should be formalised via a local Checklist or Register</p>

Task	Hazard/s Identified	Hazpak Risk Rating	Risk Control Required
<p>Collection of sharps</p>	<p>Needlestick injury and/or exposure to blood and body substances</p> <p>Potential for physical injury and transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or tetanus infection</p> <p>Secondary hazards may include manual handling, strains and sprains depending on location of sharps</p> <p>Public safety</p>	<p>Specify Hazpak rating from 1 - 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the situation and check for hazards • Make sure no one is standing nearby to avoid injury • Never place hands into any hidden areas • Wear puncture resistant gloves (use over disposable gloves if blood/body substances present) • Do not attempt to recap, break or bend needles  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take sharps container to the needle/syringe (do not carry needle/syringe to the container) • Open lid and place sharps container on ground or level surface next to needle/syringe • Use pick-up tool to grip the syringe barrel at the plunger end and place into container sharp end first (don't fill container more than ¾ full)  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If disposable gloves are worn remove gloves inside out and dispose of in the sharps container (do not push in with fingers) or in a waste container • Close lid and secure container in vehicle bracket or secure storage unit for later safe disposal • Clean pick-up tool with detergent and warm water (while wearing impermeable gloves) and if contaminated with blood or body substances treat with a suitable disinfectant solution • Complete the Community sharps report form • Dispose of container when ¾ full to a community sharps disposal bin – do not place in general waste

Task	Hazard/s Identified	Risk Rating	Risk Control Required
Manage a needlestick injury	<p>Potential for transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or tetanus infection if the skin is penetrated</p> <p>Psychological stress</p>	Specify Hazpak rating from 1 - 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm – the risk of infection is extremely low • Do not squeeze the wound. If it bleeds allow it to bleed while you wash it (if no water use sterile wipes) • Wash the wound with domestic soap and water • Pat dry the wound with clean gauze or cotton wool and apply a sterile dressing such as an adhesive plaster • Ensure the sharp involved in the injury is placed in a sharps container using the procedures listed above • Report the injury immediately to your OHS officer or supervisor/team leader and complete a workplace injury/ incident form • Seek medical advice from a registered health professional as soon as possible. Advice and appropriate risk exposure treatment may be obtained through the Accident and Emergency Department of a public hospital, the employee's own doctor or the Council's nominated doctor. Confidential advice about needlestick injuries or exposure to blood or body substances is also available from the HIV Information Line on 1800 451 600. • Supervisor/team leader should ensure they follow up with workforce members and provide all appropriate assistance and offer counselling and other services.

Task	Hazard/s Identified	Risk Rating	Risk Control Required
<p>Manage a blood or body substance contact</p>	<p>Potential for transmission of HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C if blood or body substances enter the mouth, nose, eyes or any cuts or abrasions</p> <p>Psychological stress</p>	<p>Specify Hazpak rating from 1 - 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm – the risk of infection is extremely low • If blood or body substances contact the skin, irrespective of whether there are cuts or abrasions, wash well with soap and water. • If the eyes are contaminated, rinse gently with water or saline solution while the eyes are open. • If blood or body substances gets in the mouth, spit it out and rinse the mouth with water several times. • Report the exposure immediately to your OHS officer or supervisor/team leader and complete a workplace injury/incident form. • If blood or body substances have entered the mouth, nose, eyes or any cuts or abrasions seek medical advice from a registered health professional as soon as possible. Advice and appropriate risk exposure treatment may be obtained through the Accident and Emergency Department of a public hospital, the employee's own doctor or the Council's nominated doctor. Confidential advice about needlestick injuries or exposure to blood or body substances is also available from the HIV Information Line on 1800 451 600. • Appropriate OHS officer/manager/supervisor/team leader should ensure they follow up with workforce members and provide all appropriate assistance and offer counselling and other services.

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HAZPAK Risk Assessment Table*

Find the highest priorities – for each hazard, think about:

1. How severely could it hurt someone or how ill could it make someone?
2. How likely is it to be that bad?

	+ + very likely could happen any time	+ likely could happen sometime	- unlikely could happen but very rarely	- - very unlikely could happen, but probably never will
Kill or cause permanent disability or ill health	1	1	2	3
!!! Long term illness or serious injury	1	2	3	4
!! Medical attention and several days off work	2	3	4	5
! First aid needed	3	4	5	6

Using the priority table

The table can be used to numerically prioritise each hazard based on its risk.

The numbers show how important it is to do something:

1 – it is extremely important to do something about this hazard as soon as possible

6 – this hazard may not need your immediate attention

* Table from the WorkCover NSW Guide: *Hazpak, Making your Workplace Safer*