

Wagga Wagga Sharps Action Group

Wagga Wagga City Council is a member of the Riverina Eastern Regional Organisation of Councils (REROC), which is a voluntary association of thirteen general purpose councils and two county councils located in the eastern Riverina region of NSW.

The REROC Waste Forum recognised the need for action to encourage safe disposal of community sharps several years ago, and has now produced two printings of its brochure *How do I safely dispose of my Sharps?* The brochure provides disposal advice and the location of community sharps disposal facilities in the City of Wagga Wagga and 15 towns across the region.

Following a number of needlestick injuries to workers at Kurrajong Recyclers' materials recovery facility in Wagga Wagga, Manager Geoff Pym recognised that further action was required to reduce the hazard of needles and syringes in the workplace.

Geoff registered his concerns with Wagga Wagga City Council, kerbside collection contractor SITA, Kurrajong Recyclers' own customers, and the Greater Murray Area Health Service. Geoff also conducted research on community sharps management in other areas, and enlisted the help of the REROC Waste Program Coordinator.

In late 2003 it was decided to conduct a meeting of stakeholders that would hopefully result in a commitment to undertake actions to reduce the incidence of community sharps in the workplace for staff at Kurrajong Recyclers.

At the initial meeting on 2nd September 2003, agreement was reached to continue meeting and also to broaden the contact group. The Sharps Action Group now meets bi-monthly and has achieved a significant amount in the past year.

Wagga Wagga City Council is represented on the Sharps Action Group, and works closely in partnership with it. Other stakeholders represented on the Group include:

Kurrajong Recyclers
REROC
Community Drug Action Team (CDAT)
Diabetes Australia-NSW
MS Society
Local Medical Practice
Local Dental Surgery
Local Pharmacies

Wagga Veterinary Hospital
Australian Veterinary Association-Riverina Branch
Riverina Division of General Practice
Calvary Health Service
Greater Murray Area Health Service – Community Health, Drug & Alcohol, Sexual Health, and Diabetes Education (including Aboriginal Health)
NSW Farmers Association – Wagga Wagga Branch

These stakeholders provide the Sharps Action Group with a wide cross section of community views, and members have been very active in working with Wagga Wagga City Council to develop strategies for improving the management of community sharps.

The group's impressive achievements include:

- A successful application, through Wagga Wagga City Council, for a \$4,300 grant from NSW Health to enhance council's community sharps management program.
- Printing of 20,000 stickers (see below) for placement on kerbside recycling bins.



- Printing of disposal leaflets showing the location of community sharps disposal facilities.
- Development of a poster on safe disposal practice featuring BD "Spike" the echidna (available on the website).
- Increased participation in council's disposal program by local pharmacies.
- Inclusion of a map showing the location of community sharps disposal facilities on the council website.
- Introduction of a Sharps Info-line number providing information on safe disposal of community sharps.
- A significant increase in the number of sharps collected from council's community sharps disposal facilities.

- Ongoing media coverage of the group's safe disposal initiatives.
- Improved data on incidents of inappropriate disposal to identify "hotspots" and develop a management response.
- Setting up a display on the safe disposal of community sharps at the Wagga Wagga City Council Little Big Day Out. The LBDO is designed to provide young people aged 5-12 with information on council's role and activities.
- Installation of single syringe disposal units in public toilets (see example). These metal sharps bins are available to councils at no charge under State Procurement Contract 3011 – Sharps Disposal Systems. Councils must use Becton Dickinson 1.4 Litre sharps containers and be registered with State Procurement to access the bins.
- Installation of a (24 hour accessible) 120 litre community sharps bin at a local doctor's surgery in the suburb of Koorringal.

