

## A guide to waste management responsibilities in healthcare

The Waste Minimisation in Healthcare project promotes and encourages waste minimisation and resource efficiency in Victorian healthcare facilities. This guide has been developed to help facilities build their capacity to improve waste minimisation and resource efficiency outcomes.

The guide aims to inform healthcare employees of the considerations that should be taken into account when assigning waste management responsibilities. By following this guide healthcare facilities will ensure their waste management practices are efficient and effective.

### 1. Organisational awareness

Waste management roles are directly dependent on the organisation; each facility has different ways of managing waste to suit their individual needs. Each employee, regardless of their position in waste management, needs to know and understand the overall capacity they have in developing sustainable waste management practices. Each employee in waste management must know and understand:

- the most senior point of contact (manager) for all waste management related issues
- the team of staff they are working with in waste management
- the time commitment allocated for waste management tasks
- the budget specified for waste management tasks
- the organisational policies and procedures for waste management
- other responsibilities for waste management in the healthcare facility
- relevant government legislation, policies, directions and commitments surrounding waste management.

### 2. The purpose

Each employee has a role in waste management although some particular employees have a more direct role in contributing to the core functions of waste management in a healthcare facility. The two key functions of employees with a distinct waste management role should include:

- providing communications and operational advice on relevant waste management issues
- contributing to a comprehensive waste management program through its development, implementation, integration, monitoring and/or management.

#### Key facts

*It is estimated that 260 million kilograms of solid waste is produced by Australian hospitals per annum. The exact amount of waste produced by Victorian hospitals alone is unknown but this information can be gathered through improved waste data collection and reporting. With health services growing at approximately 5 per cent per year, the amount of waste produced by healthcare continues to grow.*

### 3. The core tasks

Waste management spans all departments within a healthcare facility and it is likely that core tasks are spread throughout these different departments. For a more efficient and consistent waste management practice, a list of core tasks that should be considered is listed below. These core tasks are in addition to existing practices in the facility such as ensuring particular legislation, regulations and standards are met. The core tasks that should be considered are as follows.

Waste operations and assessment

- Develop and endorse a reporting structure in which healthcare employees with a waste role have a clear reporting line.
- Develop and implement key performance indicators (KPIs) for waste management in line with the requirements of the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards and industry best practice.
- Coordinate and/or undertake assessments of the waste production in all departments of the healthcare facility.
- Coordinate and monitor all waste disposal operations.
- Take suitable actions to reduce total waste produced and increase resource efficiency outcomes.

Waste data collection and reporting

- Coordinate and/or undertake waste data collection and analysis.
- Prepare data reports on specified waste streams using information from waste contractors.
- Understand waste data collection and reporting requirements through the Department of Human Services' *Instructions for completing Energy and Environmental Forms*.
- Report the waste data results through the Department of Human Services' *AIMS (Agency Information Management Systems)* corporate reporting system.
- Report on waste assessments, results, strategies and achievements to senior management.

#### Key facts

*It is estimated that the Victorian public hospital sector is paying a minimum of \$10 million per annum for the disposal and treatment of solid waste and recyclables. However, the overall cost of waste management within the public hospital sector, including disposal plus transport and associated costs, is likely to be at least \$90 million per annum. By reducing the amount of waste produced, healthcare will reduce their overall costs for waste management.*

#### Waste education and training

- Educate relevant staff on the importance of efficient waste management practices, including the relevance of the *Waste Minimisation in Healthcare kit*.
- Ensure appropriate waste separation practices are in place and that appropriate segregation signage and containers are used.
- Train and educate staff on their responsibilities through appropriate waste minimisation and segregation.
- Educate relevant staff on best practice guidelines and legislative requirements in waste management.
- Inform relevant staff about the Department of Human Services' *Capital Management Guidelines for Waste Management*.

#### Waste minimisation

- Assess waste reduction opportunities and implement suitable programs and practices where applicable.
- Assess resource recovery opportunities and implement suitable programs and practices where applicable.
- Use the Department of Human Services' *Waste Management in Hospitals and Healthcare – Online Tool* to provide ideas on more efficient waste management of particular waste streams.
- Demonstrate examples of waste minimisation and resource recovery to save costs incurred by the healthcare agency.
- Provide reports on progress in waste minimisation and resource recovery.

### Key facts

*General waste sent to landfill takes up valuable space as well as producing several environmental and social problems. It means that any natural resources embedded within that waste are not recovered and can create greenhouse gas emissions, pollution and litter. Landfills can also be unpleasant for nearby neighbours due to potential odour and litter issues. By minimising general waste through source reduction and waste segregation, associated environmental impacts and social issues will be reduced.*

#### 4. Consider the best structural approach

Waste management responsibilities and actions need to span various departments to achieve effective agency-wide results. Therefore it is crucial that departments and individuals work together to achieve the best overall waste management outcomes for the healthcare facility.

In an effectively functioning waste and environmental program there should be a broad framework to bring decision makers and implementers together to bring about change. Each team/individual has a specific role but should communicate and work together to ensure common goals are met through the best structural approach. Each employee should have a specified role, support and leadership from above. A broad framework in striving to achieve the most effective structural approach should include:

- a senior executive with overall responsibility for efficient and effective waste management systems and practices
- a team of senior management with the authority to make high-level decisions on waste management
- a team of representatives from a variety of departments that largely have an operational responsibility in waste management
- a team of representatives that largely have an implementation responsibility in waste management.

Regardless of the structural approach in the healthcare agency, each employee in waste management should give consideration to:

- building a strong relationship with senior management who have the authority to make high-level commitments and decisions in waste management
- contributing to the development and effective functioning of a dedicated team with operational, communication and/or implementation waste responsibilities across a variety of departments
- being part of a network of healthcare employees managing waste across Victoria and sharing experiences
- engaging in other sustainability-related programs with external stakeholders that could produce wider sustainability benefits to the healthcare agency
- making best use of resources available through external stakeholders such as the Department of Human Services, Sustainability Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

#### 5. Strive for continual improvement

This guide outlines key tasks to ensure the development of efficient waste management systems in healthcare facilities. Healthcare facilities should strive for continual improvement of waste and environmental management. With the growing importance and recognition of environmental sustainability, the responsibilities associated with waste management will only expand and evolve.

#### Key facts

*Incinerating clinical waste produces many harmful by-products such as dioxin, mercury, acid gases, heavy metals, particulates and other toxic organic compounds. By minimising clinical waste through source reduction and waste segregation, associated environmental impacts will be reduced.*

## Key resources

### ***Waste operations and assessment***

Australian Council on Healthcare Standards

[www.achs.org.au](http://www.achs.org.au)

### ***Waste data collection and reporting***

Department of Human Services, *Instructions for completing Energy and Environmental Forms*

[www.health.vic.gov.au/aims](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/aims)

See *AIMS 2008/2009 Public Hospital User Manual*, under Energy and Environment Reporting.

Department of Human Services, *Agency Information Management System (AIMS)*

[www.health.vic.gov.au/aims](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/aims)

Agencies will be able to access the AIMS Online Entry System for reporting purposes once waste is uploaded into AIMS.

### ***Waste education and training***

Department of Human Services, *Waste Minimisation in Healthcare* kit [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/environment/waste](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/environment/waste)

Department of Human Services, *Capital Management Guidelines for Waste Management*

[www.capital.dhs.vic.gov.au/WasteManagementGuideline](http://www.capital.dhs.vic.gov.au/WasteManagementGuideline)

### ***Waste minimisation***

Department of Human Services, *Waste Management in Hospitals and Healthcare – Online Tool*

[www.dhs.vic.gov.au/environment/waste](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/environment/waste)

Sustainability Victoria, *ResourceSmart Government program*

[www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for\\_government/waste\\_and\\_recycling.html](http://www.resourcesmart.vic.gov.au/for_government/waste_and_recycling.html)

A dedicated ResourceSmart Healthcare program is being developed but in the meantime this website has useful information on waste minimisation and recycling.

### ***Consider the best structural approach***

Practice Greenhealth

[www.practicegreenhealth.org](http://www.practicegreenhealth.org)

### ***Key facts***

Health Care Without Harm

[www.hcwh.org](http://www.hcwh.org)

Victorian Government, *Towards Zero Waste*

[www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/1344-towards-zero-waste.asp](http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/1344-towards-zero-waste.asp)