

Clinical or related waste management

The Queensland Government introduced the *Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Policy 2000 (the Policy)* and *Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Regulation 2000 (the Regulation)* to co-ordinate and clarify waste management practices and provide environmental safeguards for waste. Both pieces of legislation are administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

One type of waste requiring special treatment under the Regulation is clinical and related waste.

Clinical and related waste must be handled, stored, packaged, labeled and transported appropriately to minimise potential for contact with the waste and to reduce the risk to the environment from accidental release.

What is clinical waste?

Clinical waste is waste that has the potential to cause disease, including, for example, the following:

- animal waste;
- discarded sharps;
- human tissue waste;
- laboratory waste.

Discarded sharps are objects with sharp points or cutting edges such as used hypodermic or other medical needles, scalpel blades, lancets, scissors and broken laboratory glass.

Any hypodermic needles generated in any situation must always be disposed of in rigid-walled, puncture-resistant containers, and all possible care should be taken to safely dispose of any other waste. Any sharps discarded at premises that generate clinical or related waste must be disposed of into an Australian Standards compliant container.

Human tissue waste includes blood and blood components such as plasma, material heavily contaminated with blood, human tissue removed during medical procedures and some other bodily fluids.

Laboratory waste means a specimen or culture discarded in the course of dental, medical or veterinary practice or research. This includes wastes contaminated by genetically manipulated material or imported biological material. Laboratory waste also includes cultures and stocks of infectious agents.

Animal waste is any discarded material including carcasses, body parts, blood or bedding from animals contaminated with an agent infectious to humans. Dead animals at the side of the road or animals put down due to old age or injury do not have to be disposed of as clinical waste.

Related waste is waste made up of, or contaminated with, chemicals, cytotoxic drugs, human body parts, pharmaceutical products or radioactive substances.

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Cytotoxic drugs are drugs known to have carcinogenic, mutagenic or teratogenic potential. Pharmaceutical products are restricted drugs under the Health (*Drugs and Poisons*) Regulation 1996.

What is not clinical waste?

In certain cases, clinical waste need not be managed in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation. These circumstances include clinical waste generated in the home (except hypodermic needles) or as a result of emergency first aid given by members of the public (not including ambulance attendants, police, doctors or nurses in the course of their work), by beauty care or ear/body piercing establishments, by animal bathing services or facilities having animals, by some medical practitioners, and in first aid rooms.

Storing clinical waste

The Regulation has specific requirements for storing clinical waste before it is transported off-site for treatment. These requirements have been introduced to prevent harm to humans, avoid contamination of soil and surface waters, and to assist in ensuring correct disposal.

Premises generating and storing their own clinical waste do not require a development approval for waste storage under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*. However, those premises storing clinical waste received from generators off-site must obtain a development approval and become a registered operator for the activity¹.

Clinical and related waste must be:

- bagged and stored in rigid-walled, leak-proof secondary containers, preferably in a bunded area with an impervious surface (e.g. concrete);
- stored in bags and containers coloured yellow, and marked with the biohazard symbol and the words "CLINICAL WASTE";
- kept so as not to cause environmental nuisance (e.g. by refrigerating potentially odorous materials); and
- kept in an area not accessible to unauthorised people or animals.

Transporting clinical waste

Transportation of regulated waste for fee or reward or in quantities of more than 250kg in a load requires a development approval. The transport of clinical waste triggers record keeping and reporting requirements². Transporting clinical waste refers to movement of waste both on-site and off-site. Recommendations for on-site movement of clinical waste include:

- move waste in rigid-walled, leak-proof, puncture resistant containers;
- avoid moving waste in plastic bags;
- do not use waste disposal chutes;
- minimise exposure to waste (e.g. avoid moving waste during visiting hours and meal times, or through public areas); and
- avoid overfilling containers.

¹ Please refer to the EPA information sheet *Requirement to become a registered operator to carry out certain ERAs* - which can be viewed online at <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/>.

² See the guideline: *Waste Management – Managing waste tracking in Queensland* at the above website.

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Recommendations for moving waste off-site include:

- transport waste in rigid-walled, leak-proof, puncture resistant containers;
- do not use plastic bags;
- fit secure lids to containers;
- ensure reusable containers are in good condition;
- preferably use vehicles kept solely for transporting clinical waste;
- keep the driver's area segregated; and
- use a vehicle that is easy to load and clean, and is fitted with a method of securing containers, to prevent containers falling in transit.

Disposing of clinical and related waste

Disposal to landfill of chemical waste, cytotoxic waste, human body part, pharmaceutical waste and radioactive waste is not permitted. All these wastes, except radioactive waste, must be incinerated before they can be disposed to landfill. Radioactive waste must be managed in accordance with the *Radiation Safety Act 1999*.

Clinical and related wastes that have been treated through a registered treatment process to render them safe and unrecognisable may be landfilled as limited regulated waste.

In some local government areas, listed as scheduled areas in Schedule 8B of the *Environmental Protection Regulation 1998*, untreated clinical waste may be disposed to landfill under supervised burial conditions.

Further information

For copies of EPA supporting information, visit the website at www.epa.qld.gov.au.

Other information sheets in this series include:

- Clinical or related waste storage
- Clinical or related waste treatment and disposal
- Defining clinical waste
- Determining whether waste is "clinical waste"
- Managing sanitary hygiene waste
- Pharmaceutical and cytotoxic waste management
- Waste management laws

Advice and support are available through a statewide network of regional and district EPA offices. Contact details are available on the above website and in the White Pages.

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