

Information sheet

Waste Management

Managing sanitary hygiene waste

This guideline provides advice on the management of sanitary hygiene waste that is generated by premises such as aged care facilities, and the geriatric and maternity care areas of hospitals.

Sanitary hygiene waste from shopping centres, child care centres, family day care, public toilets, restaurants and other facilities whose primary function is not health care related, is not classed as clinical waste and may be managed as general waste, subject to any local government issues.

Definitions

Sanitary hygiene waste for the purposes of this Information Sheet, means disposable nappy and incontinence product waste and sanitary products including tampons and pads.

It is recommended that premises generating sanitary hygiene waste develop procedures for managing this type of waste which provide clear guidance and information on how to handle, store, transport and dispose of the waste. Large quantities of disposable nappies may cause offence to the public and waste disposal personnel. This should be considered when developing disposal procedures.

Correct waste classification and segregation at the source of generation will ensure that waste is properly managed.

For the purposes of management and disposal, sanitary hygiene waste from shopping centres, child care centres, family day care, public toilets, restaurants and other facilities whose primary function is not health care related is not considered to be clinical waste or nightsoil. Also, sanitary hygiene waste, when sourced from aged care facilities and the geriatric and maternity care areas of hospitals, is not considered to be nightsoil.

Management practices

Sanitary hygiene waste from shopping centres, child care centres, family day care, public toilets, and restaurants and other facilities whose primary function is not health care related and from aged care facilities and the geriatric and maternity care areas of hospitals does not need to be managed as clinical waste and the following segregation and treatment practices do not apply.

Segregation

The source of sanitary hygiene waste determines the type of treatment required before it can be disposed to landfill. Sanitary hygiene waste should be segregated on the following basis:

- if it comes from a person who is known to have an infectious disease (e.g. from an isolation area) or if it is saturated with, or containing free-flowing blood or other body fluids, must be segregated and managed as a clinical waste;
- if it comes from a person who is receiving cytotoxic drugs, it must be segregated and managed as a cytotoxic waste;
- if it comes from neither of the above, it can be segregated and managed as general waste.

Treatment

If sanitary hygiene waste is classified as clinical waste, it must be treated in an approved facility either by incineration, autoclave, chemical disinfection or microwave options prior to landfill disposal. If the waste is generated in a scheduled area, it need not be treated but can be disposed directly to landfill through supervised burial.

If the waste is classified as cytotoxic, it must be incinerated in an approved facility before it is disposed to landfill.

If the waste is classified as general waste, it does not require any special treatment prior to disposal.

Storage

Sanitary waste classified as clinical waste or cytotoxic waste must be stored in an area that is not accessible to animals or unauthorised persons. The facility must ensure that the storage of sanitary hygiene waste, whether classified as general waste or clinical waste, does not create an environmental nuisance (e.g. odour).

Transport

The Environmental Protection Agency has an Operational Policy which states that used sanitary items are not regulated waste for the purposes of the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*, with the exception of incontinence product waste that is:

- sourced from a person receiving cytotoxic drug treatment; or
- sourced from a person known to have an infectious disease.

A person transporting only sanitary hygiene waste that is classified as general waste, is not required to hold a development approval¹ to undertake this activity.

Disposal

If the waste is classified as general waste, it can be disposed of to landfill without prior treatment. However, advice should be sought from the local government in whose landfill the waste is proposed to be disposed regarding whether or not the local government will accept the waste.

A local government may choose to refuse to accept wastes into its landfills irrespective of the definitions, classification and management guidance contained in this information sheet.

Sanitary hygiene waste classified as clinical waste can be disposed to landfill if it has been treated in an approved facility. However, untreated clinical sanitary hygiene waste generated in a scheduled area can be disposed to landfill through supervised burial.

Management practices for sanitary hygiene wastes

Waste classification	Source	Disposal	Development approval
General waste	General hospital ward areas, aged care facilities, child care centres, shopping centres, public toilets	Landfill (if accepted by the local government)	NO
Clinical waste	Isolation ward or persons known to have an infectious disease	Treatment at an approved facility prior to landfill disposal OR Supervised burial in a landfill in a scheduled area	YES
Cytotoxic waste	Persons receiving cancer chemotherapy	High temperature incineration	YES

¹ A development approval is a legally binding agreement (under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*) that outlines the holder's commitment to protect the environment and the EPA's approval of activities operating in an acceptable environmental manner.

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 management
- Clinical or related waste storage
- Clinical or related waste treatment and disposal
- Defining clinical waste
- Determining whether waste is “clinical waste”
- Pharmaceutical and cytotoxic waste management
- Waste management laws

If you generate, transport or treat clinical waste you may be required to obtain a development approval and become a registered operator with the relevant administering authority. Please refer to the EPA Information Sheet *Requirement to become a registered operator to carry out certain ERAs*.

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.

Disclaimer:

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