

# Sharps Disposal

Managing Household  
Generated Sharps

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# Drivers in Increased Sharps Usage

- Health care moving from health care facilities to home based care
  - 13.5 million people in the US are discarding 7.8 billion used needles outside the traditional healthcare setting
  - In the past 10 years the number has gone from 9 million to 13.5 million people injecting at home disposing 3 billion to 7.8 billion needles
- More medicines than ever before are dispensed in a self-injected manner
- Results in an ever increasing number of sharps in the waste stream



# Scope of the Problem

- Each year 600,000 to 800,000 people are injured by sharps – from health care workers to bus services and urban transit workers; from elementary and secondary schools workers to those in hotels, motels and sanitation services
- Improperly disposed needles can poke through clothing, boots and heavy gloves
- In cost of post-exposure treatment (incident related costs, does not include cost for complications from injury such as infection, etc)
  - Estimates range from \$500 to \$3,000 per incident



# Impacts on the Waste Industry

- Physical/emotional trauma to individual
- Loss of work productivity and income
- Cost of diagnostic testing and treatment
- Transmission of pathogenic diseases
- Life altering illnesses (HIV, HEP B & C)
- Long-term medical care
- Lawsuits, litigation and settlements

This is a worker safety issue for environmental service workers!



**Most sharps end up in the municipal waste stream!**

# WM Efforts to Protect our Workers

- Strict protocols for our recycling centers, transfer station, and landfill workers as well as for our drivers
- Provide on-going training
- Invests in protective gear for our recycling center workers
  - For the past eight years, WM has been working closely with a leading manufacturer, HexArmor, on the development of puncture and needle resistant personal protective equipment including gloves and sleeves to protect our employees



# WM Creative Solutions for Cities

WM is working with our municipal customers to create low cost solutions for their residents

- Home delivery Sharps Mail Back programs
- Sharps collection centers and events
- Pharmaceutical waste collection events



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# State Laws

- Improper sharps disposal is gaining attention of industry, public and federal and state agencies
- Several states have passed some form of legislation to keep needles out of the household trash
- In 2008 California banned needles from the MSW (unfunded mandate)
- Sacramento passed a city ordinance requiring that pharmacies accept sharps from the community
  - Household Hazardous Waste programs were encouraged to accept sharps
  - SB 486 required pharmaceutical companies to report to the state a company's efforts to provide disposal of sharps
- Additional states considering legislation (RI, Maine)
- With Cities moving toward increasing diversion and zero waste, the need for extended producer responsibility is increasingly urgent



# Wrap up

- Trends in healthcare at home, along with increases in the incidence of diseases which require self injected medications contribute to the increase in sharps that need to be properly managed
- Removing needles from the household trash is a shared responsibility among all stakeholders involved
- Solutions should include a variety of programs tailored to the needs of the community
- Educating and informing the public on current disposal recommendations/solutions available in their community is essential

