

# A Household Guide for Alabamians: Handling and Disposal of Home Medical Waste

## HAZARDS:

- Medical sharps improperly thrown into household garbage can poke through garbage bags causing injury to sanitation workers and others, including children and housekeepers, who may come in contact with the household garbage. Used needles can transmit serious diseases.
- Medications flushed down the toilet or poured down a drain may adversely affect the function of a septic tank and can harm fish and other marine organisms.
- Unwanted or expired medicines or pharmaceuticals may be harmful to children and adults.
- Never share used needles.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISPOSAL OF NEEDLES OR "SHARPS"



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- Prevent injury, illness and pollution by following these simple steps to dispose of sharp needles and contaminated materials used when administering health care at home. Keep you, your family, and sanitation workers safe.
- Place needles, syringes, lancets and other contaminated sharps in any puncture-resistant, resealable, disposable household container (examples include an empty bleach bottle, laundry detergent bottle, or metal coffee can). Choose a container that is made of plastic or metal and one that has a small opening so no one can stick his or her hand into it. Do not use clear plastic or glass containers.
- Using an EASY TO READ marker, write on the container – "DO NOT RECYCLE." Used needles and other contaminated sharps are NOT recyclable.
- Do not purposely bend, break, or otherwise manipulate needles before inserting them into the disposal container. Drop all parts into the container.
- Once your container is full of used needles, fill the container with one part bleach solution and ten parts of water. Allow solution to soak for 20 minutes; this action will sterilize your used sharps. Then, pour the solution into the sink and seal the cap with tape before placing the disposal container into the garbage. Use heavy-duty tape (such as duct tape).
- Dispose of the container in your regular household garbage.
- Be sure to keep all containers with discarded sharps out of reach of children and pets.
- Place any soiled bandages, dialysis machine filters, disposable sheets, clothing, and medical gloves separately in securely fastened plastic bags before placing them along with your other garbage.
- Do not dispose of medication down a drain or toilet.
- Follow guidance from the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on disposing of drugs in the household trash. See: *How to Dispose of Unused Medicines*, October 2009, at <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm101653.htm> or contact ADEM for more information.

# ADEM

For more information call the Alabama Department of Environmental Management: **334-271-7700**