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RE: Syringes and Recyclables Don't Mix!!

What would you do if you stepped on a dirty hypodermic needle? What are the chances you could become infected with HIV, the hepatitis B virus (HBV) or the hepatitis C virus (HCV)? What would it cost for medical treatment; days off from work and a host of other variables?

These are questions the employees of the ARC Recycling Center and commercial trash haulers ask themselves each and every day because more and more often residents are placing their used syringes (sharps) in everyday recyclable containers i.e. soda bottles, laundry detergent bottles etc., and these syringes are ending up on the floor of the County's recycling center on Buyea Rd.

There are 19 people working at the Madison County ARC Recycling center on Buyea Rd. Everyday they must be on the lookout for recycling containers filled with used hypodermic needles. **Why?** Because some of the residents of Madison County are not putting their used syringes in the proper biohazard containers.

Madison County, the Department of Solid Waste and Sanitation and the employees of the ARC Recycling Center are asking that you do the responsible thing – place all used syringes in the bright red biohazard containers that are FREE at all pharmacies in Madison County. **“Please DO NOT place syringes in your recyclable containers!”**

The bright red biohazard containers are FREE at all pharmacies in Madison County – all one has to do is ask and they will be handed a FREE container. For more than 15 years Madison County has provided the biohazard containers to area pharmacies in an effort to keep used syringes (sharps) out of recyclable containers and out of the recycling center where they have the potential of injuring and/or infecting one of the workers.

Sharps and recycling don't mix! Sharps should never be placed in recyclable containers!

There are a host of reasons to keep syringes or sharps out of recyclables – the first and foremost reason is the possibility of injury to those who work in the ARC Recycling center and those in the trash collection business. All of these people are at risk if used syringes are placed in your recyclables rather than being placed in the proper biohazard container, which are FREE at all Madison County pharmacies.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), exposures to blood and other body fluids occur across a wide variety of occupations. Health care workers, emergency response and public safety personnel, and other workers can be exposed to blood through needle stick and other sharps injuries, mucous membrane, and skin exposures.

The pathogens of primary concern are the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus (HCV). Workers and employers are urged to take advantage of available engineering controls and work practices to prevent exposure to blood and other body fluids.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, estimates that about 385,000 sharps-related injuries occur annually among health care workers. However, as pointed out earlier in this article those working in recycling centers and trash collectors are also at risk when sharps are placed in the wrong containers. The red biohazard container alerts everyone who comes in contact with it to what is inside. But, those working at the recycling center or as trash haulers are not expecting to find used needles in recyclable containers.

The cost of a sharps injury can be a compelling reason to use safer sharps practices. One sharps injury can cause a number of direct and indirect costs for both employers and employees. Some of the direct and indirect costs include:

1. Loss of employee time
2. Cost of tying up staff to investigate the injury
3. Expense of laboratory testing
4. Cost of treatment for infected staff
5. Cost of replacing staff

The importance of proper disposal of used syringes cannot be over stated, said Director of the Solid Waste and Sanitation Dept. James A. Zecca. For more information call the Sharps Hot Line at 1-800-721-2208.

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See photo and cutline below



Joel Lockwood, foreman at the ARC Recycling Center on Buyea Rd. demonstrates what could happen when sharps (hypodermic needles) are disposed of incorrectly in everyday recyclable containers. Employees at the recycling center can be injured, which could result in expensive medical treatment and time lost from work. Madison County is asking residents to please use the bright red bio-hazard container that are free at any pharmacy in Madison County or at any of the County transfer stations. Photo by Sharon A. Driscoll