UNCW Medical Waste Plan

Improper handling and disposal of medical waste can result in disease transmission, accidental injury, environmental damage and regulatory noncompliance. UNCW’s Medical Waste Plan establishes practices for the safe handling and disposal of potentially infectious materials, some biological wastes, sharps, and other associated items. The plan encompasses requirements of the North Carolina Administrative Code, 15A NCAC 13B Section .1200, and Occupational Safety and Health Standards referenced by and 29 CFR 1910.1030. Guidance and interpretation is provided by NC DENR at: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wm/sw/medicalwaste/guidance.

SCOPE AND APPLICATION

The Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) Department manages implementation and operation of the Medical Waste Plan. Departments whose activities produce or require the handling of medical waste must work in accordance with the Plan and applicable regulations.

Any of these wastes produced in the course of University activities are subject to requirements of the Medical Waste Plan:

- **Medical Waste** – solid waste not otherwise defined as hazardous or radioactive, that is generated in the diagnosis, treatment, or immunization of humans or animals; or in related research, production, or biological testing.

- **Regulated Medical Waste** – blood and body fluids, in aliquots greater than 20 ml, and in individual containers; and untreated microbiological and pathological wastes.
  - Microbiological waste means cultures and stocks of infectious agents.
  - Pathological waste means human tissues and the carcasses/body parts of animals that were exposed to zoonotic pathogens, used in pharmaceutical testing, or known to have died of a disease transmissible to humans.

- **Sharps** – needles, needle/syringe assemblies, capillary tubes, slides, cover slips, and scalpel blades.

HANDLING

Under the principles of universal precautions, all waste materials covered by this plan are considered potentially infectious. Handle this material in a way to minimize the potential for exposure, whether by absorption, inhalation, ingestion or injection. Engineering and administrative controls, as well as personal protective equipment are appropriate. Make adequate use of sharps boxes, tools and containers, as well as lab coats, gloves, and eye/face protection.

- Supervisors and principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that persons working with potentially infectious materials/wastes are adequately trained in the use of techniques and equipment that will prevent exposure.

- Employees and others are responsible for using techniques and equipment that minimize the possibility of exposure to themselves and to others.
PACKAGING, STORAGE AND TRANSPORTATION

- Medical Waste for on-site treatment will be held in a secure location in leak-proof, covered containers that are labeled with the biohazard symbol and in a way that minimizes nuisance odors and does not foster insect, vermin or other pest problems. This includes cultures and other biological materials to be autoclaved.

- Medical Waste, other than carcasses, for off-site treatment, regulated or not:
  - Must be held in a plastic bag-lined fiberboard box or drum which is labeled with the biohazard symbol.
  - Waste is stored in a secure, dry location that minimizes nuisance odors and in a way that does not foster insect, vermin or other pest problems.
  - For shipment, bags and boxes are sealed with tape to prevent leaks. The outer box/drum must be labeled with the words *Infectious Waste* or *Medical Waste* and the biohazard symbol. Containers are labeled with the date of shipment and names, addresses and phone numbers of the generator (UNCW), transporter, storage, and treatment facilities.

- Carcasses are held in leak-proof containers or bags and in a secure location that minimizes nuisance odors and in a way that does not foster insect, vermin or other pest problems. Frozen storage is most appropriate for non-fixed specimens.

- Sharps are placed in a labeled rigid, leak-proof container with a closeable top. Snipping needles is not allowed.

- Any medical waste that is transported must be adequately contained and labeled according to the requirements for that classification of material.

TREATMENT AND DISPOSAL

Regulated medical waste must be treated prior to disposal. Primary methods are autoclaving and incineration, with microwaving and chemical treatment as other options. Treatment may be done on-site, or at a permitted off-site facility in conjunction with disposal. EH&S oversees all regulated medical waste disposal and departments are advised to consult EH&S for current best practices for disposal of non-regulated medical waste. Non-regulated medical waste does not require treatment; disposal as regular solid waste may be appropriate.

- Steam sterilization or autoclaving is the preferred method for microbiological waste. Autoclaves must chart temperature, indicate pressure, and require weekly performance monitoring.

- Containers of blood and body fluids in quantities larger than 20 ml may be incinerated or disposed of to the sanitary sewer.

- Pathological waste must be incinerated.

Charges for off-site treatment and disposal of waste from receipt-generating departments will be borne by those departments.

RECORDKEEPING

Records of regulated medical waste shipments are maintained by EH&S for a minimum of three years post-shipment and include the number of packages shipped; date of shipment; and names of the transporter, storage and treatment facility.

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