

# Safe management of wastes from health-care activities

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# Foreword

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In pursuing their aims of reducing health problems and eliminating potential risks to people's health, health-care services inevitably create waste that may itself be hazardous to health. The waste produced in the course of health-care activities carries a higher potential for infection and injury than any other type of waste. Wherever it is generated, safe and reliable methods for its handling are therefore essential. Inadequate and inappropriate handling of health-care waste may have serious public health consequences and a significant impact on the environment. Sound management of health-care waste is thus a crucial component of environmental health protection.

In both the short term and the long term, the actions involved in implementing effective health-care waste management programmes require multisectoral cooperation and interaction at all levels. Policies should be generated and coordinated globally, and the management practices implemented locally. Establishment of a national policy and a legal framework, training of personnel, and raising public awareness are essential elements of successful health-care waste management. Improved public awareness of the problem is vital in encouraging community participation in generating and implementing policies and programmes. Management of health-care waste should thus be put into a systematic, multi-faceted framework, and should become an integral feature of health-care services.

To achieve this aim, the World Health Organization, together with WHO's European Centre for Environment and Health in Nancy, France, set up an international working group to produce a practical guide, addressing particularly the problems of health-care waste management in developing countries. The group included representatives of the private sector involved in waste management activities and members of the public. This handbook, the result of their efforts, is intended to be comprehensive yet concise, "user-friendly", and oriented towards practical management of health-care waste in local facilities. It provides guidelines for the responsible national and local administrators and is the first publication to offer globally relevant advice on the management of health-care waste. The guidelines complement and supplement those produced in different regions in the past.

WHO strongly encourages the widespread implementation of these guidelines and is ready to assist users in adapting them to national settings. This book has been prepared as a practical response to the need for improved health-care waste management, especially in developing countries. Continuing efforts are being made to refine this response and feedback from users of the handbook would be appreciated. Comments and suggestions based on experience of its use may be sent to

Department of Protection of the Human Environment, World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland.

WHO has also produced a teacher's guide to complement this handbook (Prüss A, Townend WK, *Teacher's guide: management of wastes from health-care activities*; unpublished document WHO/EOS/98.6), which may be obtained from Marketing and Dissemination, World Health Organization, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. The guide is designed as the basis for a three-day training course and contains overhead slides, hand-outs, exercises, illustrations, and training recommendations.

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