



NEWS

For Immediate Release

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Americans Discard 7.8 Billion Needles Every Year

New study reports a tripling of the number of used needles tossed into household garbage during last 10 years

Houston (October X, 2011) – Recent data from the Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal (Coalition) indicates that 13.5 million people in the United States are discarding 7.8 billion used needles outside the traditional healthcare setting. The majority of these patients are managing their own healthcare (e.g. diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, HIV, Hepatitis C, osteoporosis, infertility) by self-injecting medication at home. The number of needles generated by illegal drug users increased 500,000 – from 1 million to 1.5 million in the past 10 years.

Based on this 10-year increase, the number of used needles generated in the United States has increased from 3 or 4 billion to 7.8 billion. This number excludes veterinary care in the U.S., which is reported to be significant for large animal and livestock healthcare.

The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal, a national non-profit organization made up of government agencies, professional associations and businesses, worked with Human Capital Management Services (HCMS) to examine current needle usage in the U.S. HCMS performed a meta-analysis of information available through literature and industry outlets.

“We predicted that the number of needles used and discarded in the home would increase over the past 10 years because of the increase in the average age of the U.S. population, prevalence of diabetes requiring treatment by insulin injections, and pharmaceutical treatments delivered by injection,” explains Dr. Ben Hoffman, Coalition Board Chairman. “These numbers will likely continue to increase for those same reasons over the next 10 years. Unfortunately, the majority of self-injectors are still disposing of home-generated sharps in the municipal solid waste stream (household garbage). This places environmental service workers and the general public at risk for needle stick injuries and infections from accidental exposure to used syringes (sharps) in the municipal waste stream (MSW).”

The Coalition continues to work toward providing safer disposal solutions by encouraging all stakeholders (pharmaceutical companies, device manufacturers, communities, retail outlets and associations) to work together to develop programs that are accessible, affordable and convenient.

In the past 10 years there has been positive movement to change the way patients injecting at home dispose of their used needles. For example:

- In 2004 the Environmental Protection Agency re-wrote its recommendation on the disposal of home-generated sharps which encourages individuals to participate in alternative disposal methods, such as community sponsored drop-off collection programs, household hazardous waste programs, and residential special waste pick-ups. If those are not available the EPA encourages individuals to use a needle destruction device or a mail-back program.
- The state of California passed legislation banning needles from the MSW in 2008 and continues to develop legislation to provide patients with affordable solutions.
- Mississippi passed legislation that required the state department of environmental quality to develop a plan to provide safer disposal options. Through great effort the state now offers drop-off sites in most counties at participating pharmacies.
- Florida has established drop-off programs in nearly 2/3 of the counties using fire stations, pharmacies, hospitals and public health departments.
- New Jersey's public health department has established drop-off sites at hospitals in all but one county
- In New York, by law all nursing homes and hospitals must accept sharps from the community.

“While there has been some progress, we are far from recovering the 7.8 billion needles in the household garbage,” explains Hoffman. “It’s pretty simple – needles don’t belong in the garbage. Medical waste laws require that needles be carefully disposed of as medical waste in healthcare facilities, but those same needles are being allowed in the household garbage once the patient leaves the medical facility.”

About The Coalition

The Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal a non-profit is a collaboration of businesses, community groups, non-profit associations and local, state and federal government entities committed to promoting public awareness of the hazards posed by improperly disposed sharps and solutions for the safe community disposal of needles, syringes and other sharps. For more information please visit www.safeneedledisposal.org.

About HCMS

HCMS Group is the only combined health IT and clinical services company that uses custom data analytics to help businesses reduce their health benefit costs, and also support those employees with the greatest health risks. HCMS helps companies control runaway health benefit cost, improve business performance and create great places to work, where employees feel empowered, valued and rewarded.

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