

American Society for Healthcare  
Environmental Services



ASHES

*Setting the Standard for  
Environmental Excellence*

## American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services

of the American Hospital Association

Continuing Education Series

Volume 1, Number 1

September 2001

# WASTE MANAGEMENT: TYPES OF WASTE STREAMS IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

**The ASHES's Continuing Education Series is a member service through which members may gain continuing education credits.**

To participate, read the following article and complete the post-test. Your supervisor must correct and sign the test and issue the corresponding Certificate of Completion. Retain a copy of the certificate for your files while your supervisor should maintain a copy for your employee file. If you have any questions, please contact the ASHES office at 312.422.3821.

Pamela L. Blyth  
Author

Catalog No. 197111

©2001 by the American Society for Healthcare Environmental Services of the American Hospital Association, One North Franklin, Chicago, Illinois, 60606

All rights reserved. The reproduction or use of this work in any form or in any information storage or retrieval system is forbidden without the express, written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

# WASTE MANAGEMENT: Waste Streams in Healthcare Facilities

---

Waste management in a health care facility can be a complex and confusing task to employees who are unfamiliar with the various "types" of waste generated in clinical and technical areas. It is important to understand both the different kinds of waste that must be handled and the proper procedures for safely handling that waste. Although each health care facility varies somewhat in the policies and procedures it outlines for waste management, the fundamental principles are the same – as are the required safety precautions.

Even deciding how to "name" the various "types" of waste generated in a health care facility can be a challenge since there are local, state and federal regulations that must be followed – regulations that sometimes use different ways to describe the same type of waste. For example, a state regulation may refer to "biohazardous waste", yet another agency may call the same type of waste "infectious waste".

It is important that you understand how each "type" of waste is defined by your facility – then carefully follow your departmental and hospital policies for collecting, handling, transporting, storing, and eventually eliminating each type of waste.

"Types" of waste are often referred to as "waste streams". In this document, the three major waste streams will be discussed.

## The General Waste Stream

The General Waste Stream is just what you might expect – "regular" trash! This type of waste includes typical office trash as well as items discarded in all other areas of the hospital that are NOT considered to be contaminated with infectious substances, toxic (hazardous) chemicals, or radioactivity.

General waste is typically collected in trash containers of various shapes and sizes that have been designed for that purpose. These containers are typically lined with a plastic liner to minimize soiling of the can and make collection and handling of the waste faster and safer. The liner should be lapped across the top of the can and tied in a tight knot to prevent slipping. Trash containers in a health care facility may need to meet certain fireproof standards, depending on the type of patients (overnight patients versus a day clinic, etc.) being served.

It is important that absolutely no sharp objects (sharps) such as needles or broken glass, or liquids of any kind be put into general waste containers. If you encounter sharps or liquids when collecting general waste, you should notify your supervisor immediately according to your facility's policy. Because sharps do find their way into trash containers, it is very important that you never use your hand to push down on the trash in order to compact it and make room for more – this can result in serious injury to your health.