

## Waste Management: do you have control(led)?

Understanding the difference between Hazardous and Controlled Waste

By Karen Houghton

Having a Waste Management Policy to comply with NZS 4304:2002 *Management of Healthcare Waste*, in your practice goes a long way towards reducing and simplifying your waste management strategies. But something that is often overlooked is training the team to align those strategies with the practical implementation of waste management.

Four key elements your facility should consider are:

**Categorisation:** what types of waste are being generated and are the team aware of the items that fall into each category

**Minimisation:** do you have minimisation and reduction strategies to reduce the amount of waste you are generating

**Segregation:** is waste being segregated correctly and are team members aware of how each category of waste should be handled and disposed of

**Removal and disposal:** is waste stored appropriately and removed by a registered contractor who handles it safely and; once removed, how is it treated



These considerations are relevant to all facilities generating healthcare waste such as doctors, dentists, veterinarians, cosmetic clinics, aged care providers and specialists, among others.

You would think that categorisation of waste would be pretty straightforward. Sharps waste is self-explanatory. Hazardous waste is reasonably clear as well. But what defines 'controlled' waste?

The definition of 'controlled waste' according to NZS 4304:2002 is

*Healthcare waste that is recognizable as coming from a healthcare facility which:*

- a) May be contaminated or soiled with potentially infectious human or animal body fluids which shall not be expressible under compaction; or*
- b) Is not infectious but may be considered culturally or aesthetically offensive.*

Furthermore, Appendix A outlines examples of controlled waste which include but are not limited to:

- *Used dressings, swabs, gauze etc., materials from dressing packs*
- *Specimen containers, used and emptied*
- *Used tissues, emptied sputum mugs, emptied vomit bowls*
- *Disposable gloves, masks, gowns, plastic aprons*

Considering these definitions and examples, it would be fair to say that most, if not all, healthcare providers will be generating Controlled Waste.

Controlled waste should be pre-treated by:

- Compaction (only if any liquid expressed can be fully contained)
- Sterilisation
- Grinding
- Maceration

And then disposed of by:

- Incineration; or
- In a Sanitary Landfill

So how do you know how your waste is being treated? Ask your contractor. But also take time to review your internal systems. Is your controlled waste currently going out in the general waste? Is it being processed at an appropriate facility or is it going to a transfer station or regular landfill site?

If you currently have a Hazardous Waste bin on site this can also be utilised for your Controlled Waste. This will not automatically cause dramatic increase in your waste disposal costs if you also take the opportunity to review your Waste Management Policy and train your team on strategies to categorise, segregate, minimise and reduce your waste streams.

**Want to take a proactive approach and review your strategies? Contact us for a waste management review today.**

