

## What is Healthcare Waste?

A question we get asked frequently, so this month we thought we would de-mystify what Healthcare Waste really is and who is responsible for what in accordance with the [New Zealand Standard 4304:2002 Management of Healthcare Waste](#).

Q. What is Healthcare Waste?

A. Waste generated by Healthcare Service providers.

Q. Am I a classed as a Healthcare Service provider?

A. Healthcare Services include hospitals, long-term care facilities, surgical and medical centres. It also covers, but is not restricted to: facilities providing dental or animal treatment and research; blood bank, health emergency, home healthcare, laboratory, mortuary, pharmaceutical, podiatry, tattooing, body piercing or sex services; pet shops; boarding kennels; other similar practices or premises.

Healthcare Waste is categorised as either Hazardous, Controlled or Non-Hazardous waste.

[Hazardous Waste](#) is broken down into 2 categories;

- Non-Sharps Hazardous waste and includes; Infectious, Radioactive, Cytotoxic, Body Parts
- Sharps Hazardous waste; objects or devices having sharp points, or cutting edges capable of causing a penetrating injury to humans or puncturing containers.

[Controlled Waste](#)

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

Q. What are some examples of Controlled Waste?

A. Intravenous tubing and bags, oxygen masks, empty urinary bags, catheters, disposable sheeting, incontinence pads, used dressings, swabs, gauze, specimen containers (used and emptied), tissues, sputum mugs, vomit bowls, disposable airways, bacterial viral filters, sanitary pads and disposable napkins.

[Non-Hazardous Waste](#) is recyclable and general waste.

Q. What type of Healthcare Waste does my Medical clinic produce?

A. It is likely to be a mixture of both Hazardous Waste (both Sharps & Non-Sharps) and Controlled Waste; which is generally any used materials that contains bodily fluids which are non-expressible under compaction.

Q. How do I safely dispose of my Healthcare Waste?

A. We recommend you read Section 4 of [NZS 4304:2002 Management of Healthcare Waste](#) to ensure you meet the requirements. This will outline in full your responsibilities in relation to; waste policies, audits, body parts, segregation, containers, packaging, spillages, transport operators and disposal facilities.

Q. What happens to my Healthcare Waste after it is collected from my premises?

A. Healthcare Waste; Hazardous Waste, including sharps and non-sharps, along with Controlled Waste is collected and processed using the require method outlined in section 7.6 Table 2 of [NZS 4304:2002 Management of Healthcare Waste](#).

Your Healthcare Waste is pre-treated using high temperature Sterilisation, the waste then goes through a Grinding process to breakdown the matter before being transported to a Sanitary Landfill.

Q. How is a Sanitary Landfill different from a General Waste landfill?

A. A Sanitary Landfill must meet some strict criteria to ensure that waste is spread in a manner that protects the environment eg. by spreading waste in thin layers and ensuring it is covered with soil by the end of each working day, constructing barriers and evacuating the gases produced.

If you are a generator of Healthcare Waste, we strongly recommend you purchase a copy of the [NZS 4304:2002 Management of Healthcare Waste](#) to ensure you meet the requirements of operating under best practice principles.