

# Medical Waste

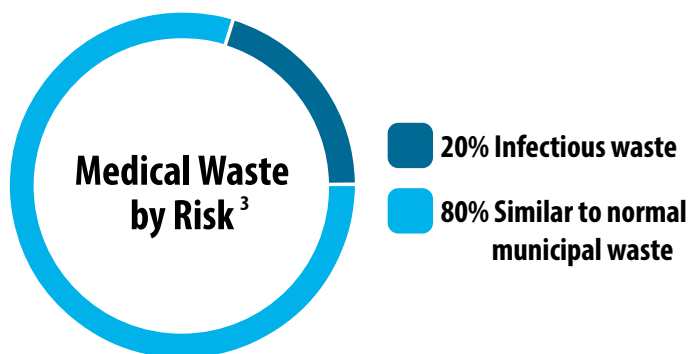
## INTENT

Protect public health by reducing the volume and toxicity of waste produced by the health sector, while implementing the most environmentally sound waste management and disposal options.<sup>1</sup>

The combined toxic and infectious properties of medical waste represent an underestimated environmental and public health threat. A recent literature review concluded that over half the world's population is at risk from the health impacts of healthcare waste.<sup>2</sup> Waste is usually categorized according to the risk it carries.

## HOSPITAL SOLUTIONS

- Healthcare waste should not cause any adverse impacts on human health or the environment.<sup>3</sup>
- Waste reduction and proper segregation is essential. By properly sorting and reducing waste, hospitals not only avoid disposal costs and environmental hazards.<sup>4</sup>
- Avoid medical and non-medical waste being mixed together, hospitals end up paying additional charges to dispose of increased volumes of medical waste.<sup>1</sup>
- Reducing the amount of raw materials, energy and processing needed to replace the products they use.<sup>4</sup>
- Health facilities can cut waste and greenhouse gas emissions through composting, recycling (including anesthetic gases), better purchasing (minimizing packaging, using reusable rather than disposable products, and buying recycled products), and minimizing waste transport (local treatment and disposal).<sup>3</sup>



## FIRST STEPS

- Make recycling receptacles easily available and visible to staff and the public.
- Implement environmentally preferable purchasing procedures and avoid toxic materials such as mercury, PVC and unnecessary disposable products.<sup>4</sup>
- Set up a waste management committee and allocate a dedicated budget for waste management. Implement a comprehensive waste reduction program, including avoiding, where feasible, injectable medicines where oral treatments are as effective. Support and participate in the development and implementation of “zero waste” policies that significantly reduce the amount of waste generated at the hospital level.<sup>5</sup>
- Segregate waste at source and initiate recycling for non-hazardous wastes. Implement a comprehensive waste management training program, including injection safety and safe handling of sharps and other waste categories.<sup>5</sup>
- Advocate for public authorities to build and operate secure landfills to manage nonrecyclable waste post-treatment.<sup>5</sup>

### CITED SOURCES:

<sup>1</sup>Health in the Green Economy: Co-Benefits to Health of Climate Change Mitigation. WHO 2010.

<sup>2</sup>Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis. Island Press, 2005.

<sup>3</sup>Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change. The Lancet, Vol. 373, May 16, 2009

<sup>4</sup>Preventing Disease Through Health Environment. WHO, 2006.

<sup>5</sup>Safe health care waste management. Policy paper. WHO, 2004.