

# Sharp Objects Are Not Regular Trash

By Neil D. Rosenberg

The growing number of home health patients who use syringes, needles and lancets, including hundreds of diabetics, has prompted state public health officials to warn again that disposal of such items no longer is allowed in routine collection.

Because the so-called sharps pose health hazards to garbage collectors and workers in recycling facilities, curbside disposal was banned statewide in 1994. The ban also made it illegal to dispose of untreated sharps in landfills.

"Requirements for packaging and disposing of sharps applies to everyone in Wisconsin, including people who use these items at home," said Barb Derflinger, medical waste coordinator for the state Department of Natural Resources.

The DNR currently is attempting to set up "sharps collection stations," centralized spots within a community for disposal of sharps. Pharmacies, hospitals, clinics, physician offices and community health agencies are among the sites targeted for such stations. So far, 300 stations have been registered with the DNR in 57 of the state's 72 counties.

Those who use sharps have been advised that they must place the used sharps in a commercial container designed for such purposes, sold at some pharmacies; or placed in a heavy plastic detergent bottle with screw caps. Coffee cans with plastic lids, and plastic milk jugs are not suitable, the DNR warns.

Syringes should be capped or the needles clipped off before placing them in the container. The containers also must be labeled with the words "biohazard," "infectious waste" or "sharps." When filled, they can be disposed of only at a sharps collection station. Locations of such sites can be obtained by calling the local DNR office, or the American Diabetes Association at (800) 342-2383.

The container also may be accepted by a licensed infectious waste treatment facility or hauler. These can be found in the Yellow Pages under waste disposal. Such sites can charge a fee for accepting the sharps, but only enough to cover costs.