



New plan for needles, syringes

Written by [Adam Spencer, The TriPLICATE](#) March 20, 2012 01:00 am



Less than 40 percent of the needles and syringes used in Del Norte County homes are disposed of properly. A new sharps collection program aims to change that.

A normal day at the office for Anthony Jackson consists of separating recycled items at Julindra Recycling. Cans go over there, number two plastics go there, needles go ... with him to the emergency room.

Jackson recently spent four hours in the ER after an epinephrine pin (used after bee stings for those allergic) pierced halfway through his thumb while he was at work.

“All I knew is it really hurt and I was shaking from the epinephrine,” Jackson said, adding that he comes across needles at least once a week at Julindra.

Throwing away or flushing sharps poses serious risks to sanitation workers and is illegal.

The Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority’s goal is trying to get more of the county’s sharps out of the waste stream and disposed of properly. The authority is working with the Del Norte Healthcare District and Sutter Coast to set up more drop-off locations for sharps.

Before the program, sharps could only be dropped off at the transfer station on Elk Valley Road, free of charge to residents. The Senior Center and the Open Door Clinic are planning to collect sharps within two to three weeks, after the authority’s board approves the new program.

An FDA-approved sharps container must be used for disposal — the drop-off locations can’t take a handful of needles. The red 1.4 quart containers can hold around 70-100 syringes or 300 pin needles and can be purchased at local stores for around \$3 to \$5.

Crescent Hay and Feed sells larger containers (1-, 3.5- and 10-gallon).

Dropping off needles will remain free of charge for residents, a service that has lost money for the authority in the past, but the new program could cut costs for the authority and medical providers that use sharps.

The authority is working with a new company to pick up the sharps at a cheaper price than before and medical providers could get a better rate for disposing the sharps used in-house by using the same company, said authority Director Kevin Hendrick.

The Healthcare District has agreed to pay the costs of collecting needles from the Senior Center and the Open Door Clinic and Sutter Coast Hospital is considering offering a drop-off location as well.

The authority landed a grant from Cal Recycle for outreach and advertising to let the public know how to deal with sharps.

“We can preach all we want but if the public isn't going to listen, it's going to be tough to make it work,” said Jordan Kekry, owner of Julindra Recycling. He hopes the program will cut down on the needles coming through his plant, lowering the risks to his workers.

“I think people are oblivious that people go through the recycling and uneducated about what to do with them and where to dispose them,” Jackson said, who doesn't want another ER visit. “I'm really excited and definitely think it will help.”

Reach Adam Spencer at aspencer@triplicate.com.