

TITLE: SHARPS MANAGEMENT	
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PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for the management of sharps items located in coastal environments, in particular on beaches.

The issue of sharps on beaches has on occasion created major media and public concern. Reports of needles being found on or near beaches are becoming increasingly common in certain areas.

SCOPE:

This Guideline applies to the following:

- All government authorities and agencies and those organisations responsible for the management and operation of coastal environments; and
- Those organisations experienced in public safety and responsible for the provision of public safety services.

For example:

- Coastal/marine park authorities and managers
- Lifesaving service providers
- Lifeguards and lifeguard supervisors

This Guideline applies to coastal environments, including ocean coastline and saltwater waterways that open to the oceans surrounding Australia.

GUIDELINE DESCRIPTION:

1.0 General risk management

Risk management should be integral to an organisation’s operation.

The aim of risk management is to minimise losses and maximise opportunities that are closely aligned to improving safety; not only from the physical risk perspective, but including all risks associated with the use or operation of a particular area and activity.

Appropriate control measures for each area should be determined by the hazard rating of the area (e.g. ABSAMP Hazard Rating) and may include local environmental conditions such as weather and water, and other local conditions such as geography and population demographics.

A risk assessment should be conducted for all areas to which the public has ready access to identify not only risks, but also current control measures and their appropriateness.

- a. All beaches at which it is known that swimming and other similar aquatic recreation occurs, and access to which is readily available, should have a risk assessment.
- b. As part of the risk assessment, an analysis should be completed on whether or not a lifesaving service should be provided.
- c. Coastal managers should identify any foreseeable hazards, assess their risks and take action to eliminate or control them.

2.0 General sharps management

There are three aspects to sharps management that should be considered by coastal managers and lifeguards. They are:

- a. Education;
- b. Prevention; and
- c. Response.

3.0 Education

Education should be provided to the community to contain the problem and for staff to respond appropriately, and should include:

- a. Community education on the safe use and disposal of syringes, in addition to education based on general drug awareness issues; and
- b. Staff training on the handling and disposal of sharps.

4.0 Prevention

Prevention of exposure to sharps should include:

- a. Provision of sharps disposal containers; and
- b. Beach cleaning services (identification and removal of sharps).

5.0 Response

Response to finding or being advised of the presence of sharps should include:

- a. Access to portable sharps containers and safe handling equipment; and
- b. First aid training in general hygiene requirements and treatment of needle stick injuries.

6.0 The law

In Australia it is not an offence to possess sterile needles and syringes. However, it is an offence to dispose of injecting equipment in an unsafe manner.

7.0 Safe disposal

All used needles and syringes should be placed immediately after use in a properly sealed, rigid-walled, puncture-proof container and disposed of in the nearest public sharps disposal bin.



Courtesy: www.lakemac.com.au



Courtesy: www.klenall.com.au

8.0 Unsafe disposal and community concerns

8.1 Most needles and syringes are disposed of safely and appropriately. However there are some occasions when they are not, and these occasions continue to cause public concern.

8.2 To date, there have been no documented accounts, worldwide, of any person acquiring hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV from a needle stick injury sustained in a communal or public setting.

9.0 What to do if you find an unsafely discarded needle and syringe

9.1 If you find a needle and syringe:

- a. Do not put your hands in any hidden or hard-to-access places (e.g. drain pipes, toilets or thick bushes) to retrieve it.
- b. Do NOT attempt to recap the needle.
- c. Use a sharps container or find a rigid-walled, puncture-resistant, sealable container (plastic bottles are good if no disposal containers are immediately available).
- d. Find and put on latex/rubber gloves if possible.
- e. Bring the container and place on the ground beside the needle/syringe.
- f. Do not hold the container upright in your hands as you are disposing of the needle/syringe.
- g. Pick up the needle/syringe by the middle of the barrel keeping the sharp end facing away from you at all times.
- h. Place the needle/syringe in the container sharp end first; and securely close the lid, holding the container at the top.
- i. Remove gloves (if appropriate also wash hands with running water and soap).
- j. Take the sealed container to your nearest Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) for disposal as medical waste.
- k. Other items that have come into contact with blood should be disposed of in the same container as the used needle/syringe, or placed into double plastic bags and then into rubbish, or taken to an NSP for disposal.
- l. Advise children to inform an adult if they find unsafely disposed of needles/syringes.
- m. Call the Clean Needle Helpline, 1800 NEEDLE (1800 633 353), to report any incidents of unsafely discarded needles and syringes.

10.0 Needle stick injury

10.1 Due to the risks of hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV infection, all needle stick injuries must be regarded as potentially serious. Even the tiniest break in the skin should be reported to the patient's doctor or the nearest major hospital.

10.2 At the earliest stage, hepatitis B can be prevented by prompt injections, and the sooner they are given the better. Steps that should be followed after a needle stick injury are:

- a. Stay calm;
- b. Promote bleeding at the site by gently squeezing the wound;
- c. Scrub the area gently, but thoroughly, in hot, soapy water;
- d. Wearing gloves and using forceps or tongs, dispose of needles in a sharps container so that the sharp end presents no further risk to anyone (remember to take the container to the sharp, not the sharp to the container);

- e. Send the patient to hospital for treatment and blood tests (advise him or her it is just a precautionary measure);
- f. If the needle is still stuck in the skin, treat as a foreign body wound;
- g. Report the injury (incident report form); and
- h. Consider the need for counselling of the injured person.

11.0 Further information on disposal

The Clean Needle Helpline (1800 NEEDLE /1800 633 353) is available to access information regarding needle stick injury, report incidents of unsafely discarded needles and syringes, and to find out where and how used sharps can be safely disposed of. This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is run by the Alcohol and Drug Information Service.

DEFINITIONS:

First aid means 'the provision of emergency and initial treatment given in a case of injury or sudden illness before regular medical treatment can be obtained'.

Lifeguard means 'an appropriately trained and qualified individual who volunteers or is employed at bathing beaches, pools, etc. to prevent drowning, provide injury prevention and response services, and to save people from drowning'.

Lifeguarded beach means 'a beach at which there are lifeguards supervising one or more designated safer swimming areas'.

Lifesaver means 'the traditional term for an appropriately trained and qualified individual who volunteers to provide injury prevention and response services and to save people from drowning'. **NOTE:** In these Guidelines, 'lifeguard' is the preferred term.

Lifesaving service means 'an organised and structured service comprised of lifeguards and appropriate rescue and first aid equipment supported by a coordinated backup team'

Sharps means 'hypodermic needles, syringes (with or without the attached needle), pasteur pipettes, scalpel blades, blood vials, needles with attached tubing, culture dishes, suture needles, slides, cover slips and other broken or unbroken glass or plasticware that have been in contact with infectious agents or that have been used in animal or human patient care or treatment, at medical, research or industrial laboratories'.

REFERENCES:

Australian Coastal Public Safety Guidelines

- GO1331: Beach cleaning
- GO1333: Litter control – systems and management
- GO1334 – Stormwater drainage systems – hazards and litter

First Aid and Emergency Care: Be a lifesaver, Surf Life Saving Australia, Mosby (Elsevier) Australia (a division of Reed International Books Australia Pty Ltd), 2005, 204pp.

Guidelines for safe recreational water environments. Volume 1 – Coastal and fresh waters. World Health Organization, Geneva, 2003.

Lifeguard Service Operating Procedures Version 1, Surf Life Saving Queensland, February 2005.

Surf Life Saving Australia, 2003. Surf lifesaving training manual, 32nd edition. Elsevier Australia Pty Ltd.

APPENDICES:

Nil