

Medical Waste Reduction November 1st Deadline Approaches

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Wisconsin's new medical waste reduction rules, codified at Chapter 526 of the Wisconsin Administrative Code, require medical facilities generating 50 pounds or more of medical waste per calendar month to take certain specified actions designed to reduce medical waste. Those actions include:

- Adopting a written medical waste reduction policy which commits the facility to reducing the amount of medical waste generated;
- Conducting a medical waste audit of source areas, waste types, waste quantities and waste management practices;
- Calculating a medical waste generation rate in accordance with a formula established in the regulations;
- Preparing a medical waste reduction plan for separating, reducing and managing medical waste generated at the facility and for evaluating alternatives to disposable products;
- Implementing the plan by deadlines specified in the regulations;
- Conducting annual assessments of the medical waste reduction plan and the facility's implementation efforts; and
- Submitting annual progress reports to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources certifying adoption of the medical waste reduction policy and preparation and implementation of the waste reduction plan.

The deadlines for implementation of medical waste reduction plans vary according to the amount of medical waste generated by the facility. The implementation deadline for those facilities generating 500 pounds or more of medical waste per month was last year on November 1. The deadline approaches on November 1, 1996, for implementation of a medical waste reduction plan at those facilities generating 200 to 500 pounds of medical waste per month.

While the medical waste reduction plans themselves need not be submitted to the Wisconsin DNR unless they are requested, affected facilities are required to provide annual progress reports certifying compliance with the regulations. For medical waste facilities generating 200 to 500 pounds of medical waste per month, the deadline for submission of the first progress report is March 1, 1997.

DNR has reported a low rate of compliance with the medical waste reduction plan requirements. DNR has further reported that many of the medical waste reduction plans which have been submitted are deficient.

Many medical facilities have had extensive medical waste reduction efforts underway for many years, and those efforts can be incorporated into current audits and implementation plans under the DNR rules. Other facilities may be encountering the new DNR rules for the first time or may be experiencing problems complying with rules.

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