

Pharmaceutical Wastes

Practices for Proper Handling

The proper handling and disposal of pharmaceutical wastes has become a "hot button" issue in recent years. In a dental practice, the wastes in question would include but not be limited to: **partially used carpules of local anesthetic** (totally empty carpules can be placed in with sharps waste); **transdermal nicotine patches**; partially used or expired **medications used for parenteral, IM or IV sedation** including sections of IV tubing which were in direct contact with the medications; used or expired **contents of "emergency kits"** (nitroglycerine tablets, injectable epinephrine 1:1,000, bronchodilators such as albuterol inhalers, ammonia inhalants, aspirin, injectable histamine blockers and other similar medications whether in tablet, capsule or injectable form).

As many of these compounds show up in drinking water, and as many may pose serious health concerns even at levels as low as the parts per billion range, they should not be considered suitable for drain disposal or placement in with regular trash or "red bag" wastes. EPA guidelines are to place such wastes in leak proof containers which are color coded: **white containers with purple tops** or **cream-colored containers with blue tops**. The containers should be labeled "INCINERATE ONLY" and processed at a licensed facility using high heat incineration and specific emission controls. The simple process of properly managing these wastes can yield a significantly positive public health outcome.

Related Source: <http://www.epa.gov/waste/hazard/wastetypes/universal/pharm-rule.htm>

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