

# On-site decontamination of infectious waste

## What is infectious waste?

**Infectious waste**, sometimes incorrectly referred to as *biohazardous waste*, *hospital waste*, *medical waste*, or *red bag waste* is waste that poses a human health and environmental risk due to its biological characteristics. Infectious waste in Minnesota is regulated by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA).

For more information on identifying infectious waste and the infectious waste-related terminology used in this fact sheet, see MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-30, Infectious waste for generators, at:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-sw4-30.pdf>

## What other regulations may apply to infectious waste?

In addition to the requirements in this fact sheet, transported infectious waste may also simultaneously be regulated as:

- **Regulated waste**, sometimes but incorrectly referred to as *biohazardous waste*, under the Federal Bloodborne Pathogens Standard (BBP) administered by the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) and the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Safety and Health Administration division (MNOSHA). For questions on regulated waste requirements, contact MNOSHA. See [More information](#) on page 3.
- **Regulated medical waste (RMW)**, under the Federal Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR) administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). For questions on regulated medical waste requirements, contact MnDOT. See [More information](#) on page 3.

## Who may decontaminate infectious waste in Minnesota?

Only a business certified by the MPCA to operate a *commercial infectious waste decontamination facility* may decontaminate infectious waste that they did not generate. For more information, see MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-32, Infectious waste for facilities, at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-sw4-32.pdf>

Generators of infectious waste may decontaminate their own waste, either at the site where it was generated or another site they operate, under one of three options:

- **Infectious waste that does not include sharps** may be decontaminated by the generator of the waste using any method that the generator has verified will decontaminate the waste and may then be disposed as a standard industrial solid waste without MPCA review or approval. Generators must ensure that their solid waste hauler will accept the decontaminated waste.
- **Infectious waste that includes sharps** may be decontaminated by a generator using an on-site decontamination system:
  - approved for use at any site by the MPCA. The generator must follow all conditions of the MPCA's system approval. For a list of on-site decontamination systems approved for use at any site, see MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-34, at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-sw4-34.pdf>
  - not approved for use at any site by the MPCA, if the generator obtains a site-specific use approval from the MPCA by submitting the information for **All facilities** and a **Decontamination facility** in MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-32, Infectious waste for facilities, at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-sw4-32.pdf>

## Who needs to request approval of on-site decontamination systems?

Generators decontaminating their own infectious waste that does not contain sharps do not need to notify or request approval from the MPCA of the on-site method they use to decontaminate infectious waste. The method must be incorporated into the generator's infectious waste management plan. For more information about generator infectious waste management plan requirements, see MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-30, at:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-sw4-30.pdf>

Generators using an on-site infectious waste decontamination system approved for use at any site by the MPCA do not need to notify or seek further approval from the MPCA. A copy of the MPCA system approval conditions must be maintained in the generator's infectious waste management plan and followed.

Generators seeking to decontaminate their infectious waste that includes sharps by using an on-site decontamination system not approved for use at any site by the MPCA must request a site-specific use approval from the MPCA by submitting the information for **All facilities** and a **Decontamination facility** in MPCA fact sheet #w-sw4-32, Infectious waste for facilities, at: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-sw4-32.pdf>

Manufacturers or distributors of on-site decontamination systems may request approval of their systems for use at any site by submitting information showing that the systems meet the approval standards below to:

[hw-licensing.pca@state.mn.us](mailto:hw-licensing.pca@state.mn.us)

There is no standard form, and the MPCA is not currently collecting an application fee. Do not send equipment or components to the MPCA. All information submitted is considered public data unless the submitter:

- Requests that specific information in the application remain nonpublic; and
- Identifies the particular statutory grounds allowing the specified information to remain nonpublic; and
- Shows how the specified information meets the eligibility criteria of the statutory grounds.

## Standards for decontamination systems for use at any site

**All proposed decontamination systems for use at any site** must either prevent reasonably-expected misuse or error by the intended operator or ensure that infectious waste is still decontaminated and properly managed despite such misuse or error. Examples of reasonably-expected misuse or error may include filling containers above specified fill lines, mishandling containers, or adding sufficient input materials.

Proposed decontamination systems for use at any site must meet one of the following two standards:

1. **Systems that decontaminate infectious waste and then prevent exposure during transportation and disposal** must enclose the infectious waste continuously from decontamination through transportation and disposal, or otherwise prevent exposure to the public and all persons handling the waste at the site and downstream, despite reasonably-expected misuse or error by the operator. Decontaminated waste must be hauled by segregated transport to a solid waste disposal facility that has agreed to accept the waste; the hauler and disposal facility must be identified in the site's infectious waste management plan. Infectious waste decontaminated at any site under this standard may not be placed into the normal solid waste.
2. **Systems that decontaminate infectious waste and render sharps unable to induce subdermal inoculation** must either:
  - make the sharps physically incapable of puncturing human skin by grinding, melting, or other alteration of the sharps themselves; or
  - encase sharps in a solid matrix or in a permanently sealed container. Sharps must not be exposed on the exterior of the mass or container following compacting, crushing, or shredding reasonably expected during normal solid waste handling, including refuse-derived fuel processing.

System approvals are valid until rescinded by the MPCA. Approvals remain valid for continued use and secondary market sales even if the systems are no longer being manufactured. Systems using a similar method to approved systems must be separately approved.

## More information

Guidance and requirements in this fact sheet were compiled from Minnesota Statutes, Chapter § 116, and Minnesota Rules, Chapter 7035, and incorporate regulatory interpretation decisions made by the MPCA on February 5, 2015. To review statutes and rules, visit the Office of the Revisor of Statutes at:

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/>

The MPCA's Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (SBEAP) offers free, confidential regulatory compliance assistance. The Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (MnTAP) can help reduce your waste.

### Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

Toll free..... 800-657-3864

Statewide..... 651-296-6300

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

### Small Business Environmental Assistance Program

Toll free..... 800-657-3938

Statewide..... 651-282-6143

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

### Minnesota Technical Assistance Program

Toll free..... 800-247-0015

Statewide..... 612-624-1300

<http://www.mntap.umn.edu>

### Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

Toll free .....877-470-6742

Statewide .....651-284-5050

<https://www.dli.mn.gov/>

### Minnesota Department of Transportation

Toll free .....800-657-3774

Hazardous materials .....651-215-6330

<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/>