

# **Quick Tips** for the Dental Office

## *Waste Management*

### **Waste Management**

The practice of dentistry involves the generation of both hazardous and regulated medical waste; some wastewater discharges may also be of concern. PDA recommends both the reduction and recycling of wastes as preferred waste management practices. For additional information about proper waste disposal and recycling information, please see PDA's Waste Management Guidelines.

### **Hazardous Waste**

Hazardous waste regulations are usually enforced at the state level. Waste is determined to be hazardous if it is listed on one of EPA's four lists (F, K, P and U lists) or if it displays one or more of the following characteristics:

**Ignitability** – easily combustible or flammable

**Corrosivity** – high or low pH, dissolves metals or other materials, or burn skin

**Reactivity** – undergoes violent chemical reaction with water or other materials

**Toxicity** – harmful when ingested, inhaled or absorbed; includes heavy metals and certain organic compounds

*Hazardous waste must be transported by a licensed transporter and disposed of at an approved facility.*

Examples of hazardous materials commonly used in the dental office include:

**Mercury** and silver used in making amalgam

**Lead** found in lead-foil packets and lead shields

**Silver** found in X-ray fixer solutions

**Formaldehyde**, acetones and ketones found in chemiclave chemicals

Hazardous materials that are recycled are not considered hazardous waste. Depending on how you choose to handle hazardous materials or hazardous wastes, always contact the recycling, transportation or disposal facility for packaging, handling and shipping requirements.

## Regulated Medical Waste

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Regulated medical waste is regulated at the state level. Examples of regulated medical waste in the dental office include:

**Cultures and stocks**

**Pathological wastes:** tissues, body parts and body fluids – but not extracted teeth – removed during medical or laboratory procedures

**Human blood and body fluid waste:** items saturated or dripping with blood, items caked with dried blood or items contaminated by body fluids during medical and laboratory procedures

**Used sharps:** used in patient care or treatment such as hypodermic needles, syringes and suture needles

Regulated medical waste must be handled and stored separately from other wastes. Appropriate containers such as double bags or rigid containers must be used to store regulated medical waste.

*With the exception of used sharps*, regulated medical waste may only be stored for up to 30 days from the date the bag is full or sealed (whichever came first) at room temperature or in the refrigerator (provided no problems are encountered with odors or organisms such as insects or mice), or for up to 90 days in a freezer. Used sharps may be stored in appropriate containers until the containers are full.

## Waste Water Discharges

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Sewage and other liquid wastes that are placed into sewer systems are referred to as “discharges.” Federal, state and local regulations govern waste water discharges into public sewer systems. In addition to ordinary sewage, waste water discharges from dental offices may include chemicals or metals that are subject to regulation. Chemical waste water discharges may include such wastes as:

**Straight alcohol**

**Ether**

**Peroxide**

**Solvents**

**X-ray fixer solution**

Metals contained in waste water discharges may include such wastes as silver from X-ray fixer solution, amalgam and metals from patient rinse waters.

Waste water discharges containing chemicals or metals are a concern for regulatory agencies because they may interfere with sewage treatment plant operations or pass through the treatment plant and are deposited in waterways and soils. Metals are known to pass through sewage treatment plants, and sewage treatment plants have established limits of metals permissible in their effluent and sludge.

*Local requirements vary.* Contact your local sewage treatment plant (also referred to as a Publicly Owned Treatment Works, or POTW) to determine what materials may be poured down the drain.

Dental offices that use a private sewage or septic system should not discharge waste waters containing potentially hazardous materials to their system. Discharge of such wastes to the environment may harm soils, groundwater and other bodies of water.