



TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager
FROM: Claude-Alix Jacob, Chief Public Health Officer
DATE: September 14, 2011
SUBJECT: Response to Policy Order O-6, adopted June 6, 2011

Text of Order: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the City Council on the options available to Cambridge residents and businesses for appropriately disposing of medical waste such as syringes.

The disposal of used syringes and unused medication raises several public health and environmental health concerns. Key concerns are:

1. Inadvertent exposure to human pathogens through needle pricks.
2. Still-emerging evidence that some medicines and personal care products being released into the sanitary waste stream can have significant impact on the ecology and biological survival of some sensitive species found in the waters that receive these wastes, even after wastewater treatment.
3. Negative impact of some medicines and other products on the sewage treatment processes, as this technology employs algae and bacteria to degrade the wastes in these wastewaters and these flora may also be susceptible to even trace amounts of certain products in the waste stream.

The Cambridge Public Health Department and other city departments have attempted to address these concerns through two separate efforts: (1) needle and syringe disposal and (2) disposal of unused medication.

Needle and Syringe Disposal

To address the need for sites for residents to safely dispose of used needles and syringes, the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) installed a public disposal kiosk several years ago in the lobby of the Windsor Community Health Center (119 Windsor St.), which also houses the health department offices.

Instructions for proper disposal (no loose needles!) and directions for locating this kiosk are available on the department's website at:

www.cambridgepublichealth.org/docs/needle_syringe_disposal_08.php

In addition, CPHD is working with other city departments to expand the number of sites for collection of used needles and syringes. CPHD intends to identify three or four sites in municipal buildings that are accessible to the public. Once these sites are determined, CPHD would acquire the necessary tamper-proof collection stations, which should limit safety concerns.



Furthermore, depending on the feasibility of acquiring fully secure collection kiosks, CPHD intends to discuss placement of collections stations at one or more Cambridge pharmacies.

The success of this effort to expand collection sites would depend both on the cooperation of key municipal agencies (e.g., fire, police, public works) and a mutually acceptable arrangement with pharmacies that agree to participate in this effort. The latter strategy will also be impacted by the affordability of kiosks that meet safety and security standards for placement in private retail sites (e.g. pharmacies). With these challenges in mind, CPHD expects to identify and establish several additional needle collection stations by summer 2012.

Unused Medication

The city of Cambridge has also taken advantage of an innovative program, first piloted in the State of Maine, that allows individuals with more limited mobility to dispose of unused or expired medication through the United States Postal Service (USPS).

In discussion with the Cambridge Postmaster and the vendor who initially developed a medication mail-back program with the USPS and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, CPHD piloted a small distribution program for Cambridge residents to obtain these pre-paid mailers that simply require the user to deposit the medication into the self-sealing, pre-addressed plastic envelope and deposit it into a mailbox for delivery to a U.S. EPA-certified vendor who will destroy these products without releasing them directly into the environment.

Soon after the Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) initiated this program, the Cambridge Prevention Coalition expressed interest in expanding the program to a larger population by utilizing a state prevention grant. These mailers are currently offered to seniors in a variety of venues by Cambridge Prevention Coalition staff and are also available for pick-up at CPHD or the Cambridge Prevention Coalition.

Finally, the Cambridge Police Department and Cambridge Department of Public Works (DPW) have provided invaluable assistance to the effort to increase options for medication disposal. The police department has established permanent, all-hours drop-off for unused medication at its headquarters at 125 Sixth Street.

In addition, DPW has expanded the items that they accept at the Household Hazardous Waste collection days to include unused medication. The police make this public collection possible by making available an officer to provide security for the collection of these unused or unwanted pharmaceuticals.

Information about disposal of unused medication in Cambridge is available on several department websites:

- CPHD website
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/hot-topic/medication-disposal.php
- Cambridge Police Department website
www2.cambridgema.gov/CPD/Programs
- Department of Public Works website
www.cambridgema.gov/theworks/ourservices/recyclingandtrash/hazardouswastecollection.aspx

