



THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS

GUIDANCE ON THE DISPOSAL OF WASTE England and Wales

Summary

Optometrists produce a variety of waste. This will include waste similar to that produced by offices or retail premises, as well as waste that is sector-specific such as used or time-expired drugs and used or time-expired medical devices such as contact lenses or solutions.

All waste producers have a legal 'duty of care' to ensure that their waste is disposed of properly.

The aim of this summary is to help optometrists by setting out the various categories of waste that they may produce and outlining how these must be disposed of.

The main waste streams are likely to be:

- A. Domestic type waste such as paper, cardboard, used tissues and paper towels and small quantities of items that patients would produce as waste at home such as disposable contact lenses. This can be disposed of in the normal 'black bag' waste stream.
- B. Sector-specific non-hazardous healthcare waste such as used disposable tonometer probes and large numbers of time-expired contact lenses or emptied contact lens solution bottles which do not present a risk of infection. These can be disposed of as 'offensive waste' (yellow and black striped bag, sometimes called 'tiger' bags).
- C. Non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste (includes all non-hazardous medicines whether pharmacy or prescription only - e.g. used or time expired minims). These need to be incinerated and should be discarded in a medicine disposal box. This is normally coloured yellow. Medicines which are not pharmaceutically active (e.g. saline) can be disposed of either in the non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste stream or emptied into the foul sewer and the container placed in the healthcare waste stream as in B above.
- D. Hazardous waste. This may be from the non-healthcare side of the practice (e.g. computer monitors, fridges, some batteries, some cleaning products), or from the clinical side of the practice (e.g. chloramphenicol). There are special requirements regarding the disposal of hazardous waste.
- E. In addition, some optometrists may use sharps for procedures such as removing corneal foreign bodies or performing blood tests. These should be disposed of in sharps boxes colour coded according to whether they are infectious or not (as none will be contaminated with medicinal waste).

Optometrists should ask their waste contractor to supply the various containers/bags stated above.

More comprehensive advice for College members on how to fulfil their legal requirements regarding the disposal of waste is available in the "Advisory Documents for Members" area.