

## A safety net for medical waste management

Written by William George

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It is vital for healthcare waste service providers to have a contingency plan for unexpected challenges, which could lead to a build-up of dangerous medical waste. Samantha Immelman, national sales manager for Compass Medical Waste Services, explains

Generators of medical waste – such as hospitals, clinics, laboratories, pharmacies and veterinarians – must ensure that the service provider that collects, contains, treats and disposes of their healthcare risk waste (HCRW) has a contingency plan in place to cater for unforeseen circumstances which may arise.

The service provider must be able to continue providing products and services without interruption and inconvenience, while at the same time ensuring compliance.

Here are some of the important factors HCRW generators and service providers should consider when drawing up or reviewing a contingency plan:

### Containers

These have to be approved by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) and aligned to the South African National Standards (SANS) to ensure the safe containment of medical waste. Ideally, a service provider should have more than one supplier, so that containers can be sourced from other approved suppliers in the event that a supplier can no longer deliver or produce SABS-approved containers.

### Transportation

The service provider should deliver clean containers and collect the containers filled with waste

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for treatment and/or disposal. It is important to consider whether the particular service provider has its own fleet, or whether it relies on a third party.

When a service provider makes use of a third party, it is important to be aware of how the medical waste generator will be impacted if there is a breakdown in the relationship between the service provider and transporter.

If the service provider owns its fleet, there should be a comprehensive maintenance programme in place to ensure the vehicles are fully operational at all times and properly maintained.

### **Treatment**

HCRW should be treated in accordance with the provisions of an issued waste-management licence. The service provider should have sufficient capacity to deal with a significant increase in medical waste volumes.

If the treatment plant breaks down, the service provider should have a contingency plan in place to ensure the waste is treated and not stored outside the time-span parameters of the waste-management licence.

The contingency plan could include having an agreement in place with other permitted treatment facilities to assist with breakdowns, or unscheduled maintenance. Another option for the service provider is to have multiple treatment units, so that a second unit could assist in the treatment of waste if the first unit breaks down.

If treatment facilities in an entire region are down, the service provider should have the resources to transport waste to facilities in other regions. A waste generator should be concerned when a service provider requests it to hold waste until the service provider can overcome any challenges at the treatment facility.

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