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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Animal health product containers are among the hazardous waste products that can be generated during livestock handling.

Properly disposing of livestock medical containers and the needles and syringes used to administer them is both a matter of good stewardship and safety.

Rob Eirich, Extension Educator
Director of Beef Quality Assurance,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, says having a thorough understanding of safety hazards related to each product and the proper disposal of product containers is a good first step in cleaning up after processing cattle or other livestock.

“Carefully read product labels,” Eirich says. “With the products we’re using in livestock handling it’s as important as ever to understand the hazards they can pose. Be prepared to respond to a product-related accident before it happens.”

Storing products at the proper temperature is key to preserving the product quality and effectiveness. Because product storage requirements vary from

one brand to another, it's risky to omit a thorough review of each product's label.

"Different antibiotics have different storage temperature ranges," Eirich says. "We can't assume we know how to handle a product without carefully reading its label. Talk to your veterinarian about safe handling and any need for training before using injectable products."

When treating even a single animal, safety recommendations include not working alone, properly restraining animals and handling loaded syringes with great care.

Loaded syringes should never be carried in a coat or pants pocket. Needles should be covered until they are used. Children and bystanders should be well away from the work area and handlers should have a well-marked exit route in case of an emergency.

Everyone working with products should have a clear idea of their role and responsibility in the activity.

When working with injectable products, a protective cover should be on needles before their use. Used needles should never be used to refill a syringe.

"Typically needles need to be changed every time you refill a syringe with a product," Eirich says. "That may happen with every 10 to 20 head of cattle. If you don't change the needle and use it to refill a syringe, you risk contaminating the product in the bottle and each animal that receives an injection of that product."

Used needles, when examined under a microscope, reveal that pieces of animal hide, manure or even mud can cling to needles used with injectable products.

Blood borne illness such as anaplasmosis can be passed from one animal to another by reusing needles due to residue from an infected animal that clings to the needle and comes in contact with subsequently treated animals.

“Be sure you change needles frequently,” Eirich says.

Broken or damaged syringes should be disposed of immediately in an appropriate sharps container. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cleared sharps disposal containers are available through product sellers and online. Use of a proper container helps reduce the risk of injury and infection from sharps.

Appropriate containers should be made of rigid plastic and include a line that indicates when the container should be considered to be full. Once it's full, the container must also be disposed of properly.

“You're likely to find sharps containers at a veterinary clinic or animal health supplier,” Eirich says. “Once that container is full, it should be disposed of in a dumpster or garbage receptacle. Laundry detergent bottles can be used because they're made of thick, heavy plastic.”

If a laundry detergent bottle is used, the label should be peeled off and the word “Sharps” should be clearly written on the bottle.

“Once the bottle is filled, some people pour quick crete into it and let that harden before they dispose of it to ensure no one is injured by the sharps inside it,” Eirich says. “So it can't be removed, the cap may be super glued on so it can't be removed once the bottle is full.”

All sharps disposal containers should be made of heavy-duty plastic and have a tight-fitting and puncture-resistant lid. The container should also be leak resistant and remain upright and stable during

use. A proper label is necessary to provide warning of the hazardous waste inside the container.

Eirich recommends that glass product bottles are carefully handled once they're empty to avoid breaking them, increasing the risk of cuts and exposure to residue inside the bottles.

"If you're boxing them up as they're emptied, be sure they're not breaking in the process," he says.

When sharps aren't disposed of properly, they can injure family members or waste handlers, increase the risk of contamination and infection and pollute the environment.

Sharps disposal may be regulated by the state. Agencies responsible for overseeing disposal of medical waste can answer disposal questions. Veterinarians, hospitals, pharmacies and physicians may also be able to provide disposal guidelines.

Injectable livestock medications that require proper container disposal include antibiotics, vitamins, minerals and mastitis tubes. Oral medication containers include de-wormers, antibiotics, vitamins and minerals. Topical medications are sprays, de-wormers and ointments.

Vaccine labels contain manufacturer's recommendations for container disposal or partially empty containers. Most can be burned or disposed of in a sanitary landfill.

Unused products should never be dumped down a drain or on the ground. Disinfectant should be added to unused portions of live or modified-live vaccines to reduce accidental exposure to unintended populations.

If glass containers are broken, they should be placed in a rigid cardboard box and clearly labeled as broken glass. Outdated product should be

disposed of properly, which may mean returning it to the manufacturer or the place of purchase.

Other waste products related to livestock treatment are bandages and medical gloves. The items should be secured in leak-proof bags before they're disposed of in the trash.

“Keeping an appropriate sharps container at hand all the time makes it more convenient to properly dispose of hazardous waste as necessary,” Eirich says.