

# The Oakland Tribune

September 25, 2009

## Governor should sign bill regulating needle disposal

**S**HORTLY, GOV. Arnold Schwarzenegger will have the opportunity to sign Senate Bill 486 into law. The bill, authored by State Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), gives pharmaceutical manufacturers the opportunity to develop plans for the safe disposal of sharps waste that will help consumers access safe disposal alternatives for their home-generated needles, and reduce the public safety and environmental risks arising from arising from sharps disposed in the regular waste stream.

Each year, an estimated 1 million Californians inject medications outside traditional health care facilities generating more than 300 million used needles. Because consumers, legal and illegal, have limited viable options for proper disposal, most of these

**KEITH CARSON AND ANITA SIEGEL**

*My Word*

needles are improperly disposed of in solid waste and recycling containers where they present significant public health risks.

While needle-exchange programs typically target the illegal self-injecting population, they do not directly serve the needs of those who self-inject for medical reasons.

Many cities and counties in California do not have or have ineffective sharps disposal programs, thus leaving a large gap in services with many individuals having no easily accessible facility to dispose of their home-generated sharps.

In 2006, California enacted legislation making it unlawful for individuals to place

needles in trash or recycling containers beginning Sept. 1, 2008. Public health officials, the solid waste industry, the Integrated Waste Management Board and local governments have worked to expand the scope of safe disposal options, but previous California legislation concluded the need for cooperative and active participation of the pharmaceutical industry to help solve this enormous problem.

We believe that the pharmaceutical manufacturers are in a unique position to educate their consumers on the serious risks of improper needle disposal, and to develop and promote programs that recover and destroy dispose of the needles used by their customers.

SB 486 advances this goal by requiring the pharmaceutical manufacturers that

sell or distribute self-injected medications to: (1) submit a plan to the California Department of Resource Recovery describing how they support the safe collection and disposal of home-generated sharps waste; and (2) to post a copy of the plan on their Web site.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers need to assume their responsibility for the appropriate disposal of their products and thereby assist the millions of Californians who rely on self-injected medications and want to safely manage their used needles.

---

*Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson sits on the Health and Legislative Subcommittees of the board of supervisors. Anita Siegel, RN, MPH, is the acting director of the Alameda County Public Health Department.*

# San Mateo County Times

September 23, 2009

## Safe needle disposal is a shared responsibility

**I**'VE BEEN a recycler for years. My son (now 39-years-old) learned his basic colors as a toddler by helping me sort bottles by color for recycling.

**BETTY LIPKIN**  
My Word

That commitment and concern hasn't changed for me, even though living with multiple sclerosis for the past 13 years has changed everything else in my life.

While MS makes it impossible for me to do my former work as a software release manager, my interest and concern for the environment and my fellow human beings hasn't diminished.

It concerns and troubles me greatly that I don't have a safe place to dispose of the needles I use to self-inject medication prescribed by my doctors to help control MS.

It seems crazy that it is against California law to put sealed "sharps" containers in the trash, but there's very little information or help for people such as me to safely and legally dispose of these dangerous wastes.

I know these used needles are hazardous wastes. If they end up in a municipal waste stream, they put waste collection and recycling workers at risk of contracting a range of serious diseases, such as hepatitis or HIV.

If those workers have to start treatment after a needle "stick," they face six months and more of tremendous anxiety.

When a friend told me I could propose a new law as part of state Sen. Joe Simitian's "There Oughta Be a Law" contest, I wanted to give it a try.

Simitian's Senate Bill 486 is now on the governor's desk, awaiting his signature. The bill says that pharmaceutical companies that sell and market medications to me and others who routinely self-inject prescribed medicine at home, should be required to submit plans to the state describing how they support safe needle collection and disposal programs for patients using their drugs. And they should make this information available on their Web sites.

I'm angered and dismayed that some of the

drug companies that sell me my medicine are fighting this bill. They say that safe disposal is my problem, not theirs.

I have always wanted to do right by this planet and to others. I don't want to hand the planet over to my children and grandchildren in worse condition than it was in when I inherited it. I want to do my bit. I just ask that the drug companies help me and others by doing their part as well.

I urge Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign this common sense measure.

---

*Betty Lipkin is a San Carlos resident who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1996. She worked as a software release manager until 2001, when the challenge of living with MS forced her out of the workforce.*



June 15, 2011

## Most Drug Makers Failing at Providing Safe Needle Disposal, Patient Advocacy Groups Say

*Companies' 2010 reports show little progress in helping MS, diabetes patients safely dispose of sharps.*

*2011 Reports due July 1.*

SACRAMENTO, Calif.- Makers of injectable drugs that treat chronic illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis and diabetes, are failing to provide patients safe, convenient, cost effective methods of needle disposal. That's what a new Report Card released today by a legislative evaluation team shows.

"Consumers want the answer to a simple question: what am I supposed to do with these things once I've used them?" said State Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto), who authored the 2009 law requiring injectable drug manufacturers to submit reports to the state detailing their sharps disposal programs. "This law provides consumers using 'sharps' the opportunity to do some comparison shopping, and highlights manufacturers who are marketing consumer-friendly products, as well as those who are clearly part of the problem."

Simitian's SB 486 (2009) requires makers of injectable drugs to submit annual reports to the Department of Resource Recovery & Recycling regarding their programs to provide patients options for disposal of used sharps. The bill was a result of an idea from Betty Lipkin of San Carlos, who lives with Multiple Sclerosis and who submitted the idea to Senator Simitian's annual "There Oughta Be A Law" contest.

Senator Simitian said improperly discarded sharps are an environmental threat and pose unnecessary risks to children, caregivers, hotel employees, janitors and solid waste workers.

Despite a 2006 law making it illegal to dispose of used sharps in the waste stream, Waste Management, Inc., reports that accidental needle sticks are the number one reported injury at their materials recovery centers. Nationwide, there approximately 267,000 accidental needle sticks each year, resulting in over \$175 million in costs to treat individuals who contract blood borne pathogens such as HIV and hepatitis.

It is estimated that over one million people in California use syringes and other sharps for home health care. Approximately one in twelve households in California have an individual who must self-administer an injection to treat a number of illnesses including diabetes, multiple sclerosis, cancer, anemia, and migraines. This generates approximately 386 million sharps each year in the state of California that require disposal.

Last year, an evaluation team created criteria by which to evaluate and grade those reports. The evaluation team, made up of the National MS Society, the Diabetes Coalition of California, the California Conference of Environmental Health Directors and consumer health organizations then scored the first round of reports submitted in July, giving points for such items as the quality of patient education, implementing manufacturer-sponsored needle mail-back programs, or collaborating with drug store chains to take back used needles in secure, FDA-approved containers.

"The legislature created an open book test and the pharmaceutical companies just seem to be too cool to get good grades. While we salute Abbott and Johnson & Johnson, the industry has a long way to go to fulfill their responsibilities to the complete needs of their customers."

“Apart from two companies, the report cards show the industry is failing,” said Beverly Thomassian, RN and President of Diabetes Educational Services. “The legislature created an open book test and the pharmaceutical companies just seem to be too cool to get good grades. While we salute Abbott and Johnson & Johnson, the industry has a long way to go to fulfill their responsibilities to the complete needs of their customers.”

Points and grades given to some of the major drug companies include:

Abbott Laboratories 92 A-	<b>EMD Serono/Gonal-f 65 D</b>
<b>Amgen 62 D-</b>	EMD Serono/Other 68 C
<b>Amylin 22 F</b>	<b>Ferring 17 F</b>
<b>Baxter 2 F</b>	<b>GlaxoSmithKline 49 F</b>
<b>Bayer 21 F</b>	<b>InterMune 20 F</b>
<b>Biogen Idec 22 F</b>	<b>Merck &amp; Co. 32 F</b>
Bristol Meyers Squibb 75 C	<b>Pfizer 35 F</b>
Johnson & Johnson (Centocor-	Roche/Genentech 73 C
Ortho Biotech) 93 A-	<b>Sanofi-Aventis 36 F</b>
<b>CSL Behring 2 F</b>	<b>Teva Biologics 18 F</b>
<b>Eisai 46 F</b>	<b>Teva Neuroscience 22 F</b>
<b>Eli Lilly 23 F</b>	

Paul W. Lofholm, PharmD serves on the Evaluation Team. He is the Immediate Past President of the California Pharmacists Association and a Clinical Professor of Pharmacy at the University of California, San Francisco. He says 75% percent of California’s injectable drug makers failed because they either did not in any way meet customer expectations or did not submit reports at all and are currently not in compliance with the law.

“The failing companies’ literature is almost completely silent on disposal methods,” said Ralph Cyr, a self-injector and member of the Evaluation Team that crafted the report cards. “Some actually give patients the impression that they can put used sharps in non-approved containers and dispose of them in the regular trash. This is utterly false and against the law.”

New reports are again required to be received by the state this coming July. Based on the results of the 2010 report cards, evaluation team members say they will fast track the scoring and release 2011 report cards by the end of this summer.

Until significant resources are put behind giving patients the tools they need to properly dispose of their sharps, people will be left completely in the dark.

Attachment: Evaluation team roster

For complete copies of drug company reports, visit: <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/homehazwaste/sharps/reporting/>