



LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE/  
INTEGRATED WASTE MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE  
900 SOUTH FREMONT AVENUE, ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91803-1331  
P.O. BOX 1460, ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91802-1460  
[www.lacountyiswmtf.org](http://www.lacountyiswmtf.org)

GAIL FARBER  
CHAIR  
April 5, 2010

The Honorable Board of Supervisors  
County of Los Angeles  
869 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**RECOMMENDATION TO EXPAND THE COUNTY'S HOME-GENERATED SHARPS WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO INCLUDE PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE AND TO IMPLEMENT TAKE BACK PROGRAMS**

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Solid Waste Management Committee/Integrated Waste Management Task Force (Task Force), I would like to express the Task Force's appreciation for your Board's recent action to expand the County's Home-Generated Sharps Waste Management Program (October 13, 2009, Agenda, Synopsis 10).

The Task Force applauds this Board action and respectfully requests the County's efforts be expanded to include collection of home-generated pharmaceutical waste. Also, consistent with your Board's adopted policies with regard to extended producer responsibility, we request that your Board direct the Departments of Health Services and Public Health, in concert with the Chief Executive Office, the Department of Public Works, and the Task Force, leverage their purchasing power to negotiate with their vendors the development and implementation of programs within Los Angeles County to take back pharmaceutical and sharps waste from residents.

**Pharmaceutical Waste—A Growing Concern**

The presence of pharmaceutical waste in the environment is an issue of growing concern, but the level of risk that it poses to human beings and the environment remains largely unknown. Major national studies have found that an alarming percentage of streams (as high as 80 percent of the streams surveyed) had measurable concentrations of prescription and nonprescription drugs, steroids, and reproductive hormones. Exposure, even at low levels, to medications threatens the marine environment and public health. The presence of these medications in surface waters across the nation has been associated with increased bacterial resistance to antibiotics, as well as interference with growth and reproduction in aquatic organisms such as fish and frogs.

Medications enter surface waters through various sources, including wastewater treatment plants. When unused/expired medications are thrown down the toilet or drain they enter the sewer system and wind up in a wastewater treatment plant. However, wastewater treatment plants are not designed (and therefore are unable) to remove these pollutants from the water. Therefore, measures are urgently needed to prevent these pollutants from entering the water stream. Failure to take appropriate action can have grave consequences for public health and safety, as well as the environment.

### **County and Industry Responsibility**

The County operates and maintains the flood control system, over 5,000 miles of sewers, and several sewage treatment plants. As the operator of these facilities, the County has a responsibility to address the illegal/improper discharge of pollutants, including pharmaceuticals, into its flood control and sewer systems to ensure compliance with the Federal Clean Water Act. The Act, and corresponding State water quality regulations, prohibit discharges into Federal and State waters that contain pollutants in concentrations that can harm human, animal, plant, or aquatic life.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon the County (in light of its responsibilities under the Clean Water Act), as well as the pharmaceutical industry, to develop and implement programs to collect and properly manage pharmaceutical wastes, thus preventing them from entering and polluting the water stream.

### **The County Can Make a Difference**

A recent survey conducted by Task Force staff indicated that the County Departments of Health Services and Public Health together spend over \$180 million annually on the purchase of pharmaceuticals and over \$2.5 million annually on the purchase of sharps. Both departments pay a third party vendor to dispose of the sharps waste and expired pharmaceuticals generated through their operations.

Because of its significant purchasing power, the County is in a unique position to leverage this power to negotiate the take back of home-generated sharps waste and unused/expired pharmaceuticals by vendors that sell pharmaceutical products to the County. The Task Force believes this would be an effective way to help County residents in properly managing those wastes, protect public safety and the environment, and reduce the financial burden on the County while encouraging manufacturers to take responsibility for the products they make and be part of the solution.

This would also be consistent with your Board's November 5, 2008, action in support of extended producer responsibility. This action was aimed at shifting the State's product waste management system from one that is focused on local government-funded and ratepayer-financed waste diversion, to one that relies more on producer responsibility to

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reduce public costs and drive improvements in product design that promote environmental sustainability. Extended producer responsibility focuses on placing a shared responsibility of the financial burden for end-of-life product management on the producers, and all entities involved in the product chain, instead of the general public. Producer responsibility is essential in making further strides in waste reduction and recycling, and leading California towards a sustainable future.

The Task Force appreciates your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Mike Mohajer of the Task Force at (909) 592-1147.

Sincerely,

*Margaret Clark*

Margaret Clark, Vice-Chair  
Los Angeles County Solid Waste Management Committee/  
Integrated Waste Management Task Force and  
Council Member, City of Rosemead

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cc: Chief Executive Office (William T. Fujioka)  
County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (Steve Maguin)  
Department of Health Services (John F. Schunhoff, Ph.D.)  
Department of Public Health (Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH)  
Department of Public Works (Gail Farber)  
Each member of the Los Angeles County Integrated Waste Management Task Force