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County of Santa Clara Announces Countywide Take-Back of Needles, Syringes, and Lancets (Sharps) at Valley Medical Center Locations, Local Pharmacies and Private Hospitals

San Jose, CALIF. - Beginning September 1, 2008, Senate Bill 1305 (Figueroa) will take effect in the State of California, making it illegal to place used home-generated sharps in the trash or recycling receptacles. Home-generated sharps include needles, syringes and lancets that are used to manage medical care at home. The new law mandates used sharps to be placed in approved sharps containers, which are often sold at pharmacies. Once the containers are full, they should be brought to the approved drop-off locations.

More than three billion sharps are used in the United States each year. In Santa Clara County alone, county residents generate over 1.2 million sharps each month. When sharps are improperly disposed, they pose a health threat to sanitation workers, children, adults and pets. Although the County of Santa Clara's Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Program has been accepting used home-generated sharps since 1995, the majority of used home-generated sharps are still thrown in the garbage. The effort to collect used sharps continues. Last year, the HHW Program collected 295,000 sharps and expects the number to increase once the law takes place.

"This program is necessary for public health and the sustainability of our community," stated Supervisor Ken Yeager, who asked county staff to research options for a take-back program on March 18. "We must not only meet the letter of this new law but also the spirit by providing our residents with the proper resources to be good environmental stewards."

In preparation for the September 1 deadline to comply with Senate Bill 1305, the County's HHW Program has been recruiting pharmacies throughout the county to provide residents with convenient drop-off locations. Currently, 11 pharmacies have agreed to accept sharps back from the public for free. The overall goal of the Retail Take Back Partner program is to encourage all pharmacies to be part of the solution, so that used sharps can be taken back to the stores where they were purchased.

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"Leiters Pharmacy agreed to extend our 'take back' program to include sharps at the county's request in March," said Robyn Shalinsky, a pharmacist at Leiter's Pharmacy in San Jose. "By taking back sharps, we extend our customer service and do our part for the environment. We hope other pharmacies will join this program."

The County of Santa Clara's Health and Hospital Services and Santa Clara Valley Medical Center facilities are among the approved drop-off locations for home-generated sharps. Approved drop-off boxes have been installed at all 10 Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (SCVMC) and clinic locations throughout the county. Any person who needs to dispose of their used sharps is required to place them in an approved sharps container.

"Sharps are used by many of our patients. For example, a person with diabetes would use a needle for their insulin injections," commented Dr. Hau Liu, Co-Director, Chronic Care Management Program, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center. "Our Sharps Take-Back Program will make it easier and safer for our patients to throw away the sharps they use at home."

In addition to the current Sharps Take-Back Partners, many hospitals and health care providers will also begin taking back sharps from their patients. To find a list of approved sharps retail take back partners, go to www.hhw.org or call 408-299-7300. If Santa Clara County residents are not close to an approved drop off location that accepts used sharps, ask your pharmacy to become a Retail Sharps Take-back partner.

There are other proper disposal options available:

- Mail Back Services: If you purchase sharps on-line, make sure the retailer will take used sharps back and request a pre-addressed, prepaid mail-back box. A list of mail back services can be found at <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/certlic/medicalwaste> .
- The County of Santa Clara HHW Program: Residents of Santa Clara County (except for the City of Palo Alto) can dispose of their used home-generated sharps at the Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off Events. Contact the HHW Program at www.hhw.org or call 408-299-7300 to find the location of an upcoming drop-off event near you.

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