



Red and Yellow Medical Waste Bags

Medical waste, as the name implies, is the waste generated by healthcare facilities like hospitals, clinics, blood banks, and clinical laboratories. This waste is contaminated by blood, body fluids and other potentially infectious materials. Discarded needles, syringes, human tissues, blood, bodily fluids, placenta, fetal remains, and hospital radioactive waste are all classified as medical waste. This contaminated medical waste can pose severe threat to human lives and to the environment. Red and Yellow Biohazard Bags are required to contain and segregate all medical waste.

The EPA and others do not have formal rules, but do have some guidelines on regulating medical waste. Since the early 1990s, the individual states have been given the authority to regulate medical waste how they see fit. Most commonly, organizations are directed to dispose of medical waste in red biohazard bags. (Note: The WHO's policy directs medical waste to be disposed of in yellow biohazard bags.) Regardless of the type and location of medical waste, it is important that it be treated and disposed of properly to avoid contamination.

- **Red Biohazard Bags:**

- Red biohazard bags are used to collect anatomical waste including human body fluids like semen, saliva, tissues, organs, placenta, and fetal remains, as well as animal carcasses.
- They are also used to dispose of the medical apparatus, specimen swabs, blood-soaked drapes, gloves and anything that is visibly contaminated with blood or bodily fluids.
- Only biohazard waste like blood contaminated objects and pathological waste go into the red bags. Fetal remains and placenta fall into this category and must be properly disposed of when present in hospitals or other clinical settings.

- **Yellow Biohazard Bags:**

- Yellow biohazard bags are used to dispose of clinical waste like swabs, dressings, tissues, soiled gloves, aprons, pads and nappies. These bags can also be used to collect IV lines and fluid bags used for pharmaceutical medicines, disposable metallic parts and syringe bodies.
- Yellow bags should only be used for disposal of clinical and infectious waste containing chemicals and pharmaceutical medicines.

Once the waste is collected and properly packaged, it is treated either through the use of an autoclave (high pressure steam) or pyrolysis machine (extreme heat in the absence of oxygen) before finally it is deposited in a landfill, buried at an appropriate depth, and secured against the surrounding soil so as to not leach into it over time.



Sources:

1. The CDC's governance of medical waste:
<https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/guidelines/environmental/background/medical-waste.html>
2. EPA's general guidance on medical waste (implemented through RCRA)
<https://www.epa.gov/rcra/medical-waste>
3. EPA's model guidelines for medical waste management:
https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-02/documents/model_guidelines_for_state_medical_waste_management.pdf
4. Third party medical waste disposal website: <https://usbioclean.com/red-medical-waste-disposal-bags/>
5. The World Health Organization's medical waste guidance:
<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259491/WHO-FWC-WSH-17.05-eng.pdf>

