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## Introduction

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This handbook recommends safe, efficient, sustainable, and—it is hoped—affordable and culturally acceptable methods for the treatment and disposal of health-care waste, both within and outside health-care establishments. Particular attention is paid to basic processes and technologies; more sophisticated or advanced methods, many of which have been undergoing major developments, are often addressed in less detail. Smaller health-care establishments in remote locations or with very limited resources may wish to confine themselves to the minimal health-care waste management programme recommended in Chapter 16.

In publishing this handbook, WHO aims not only to promote a sound managerial approach and the use of appropriate technologies, but also to inform countries about the health risks that result from inadequate management of health-care waste. The advice and guidance offered are intended to assist both national bodies and individual medical institutions to improve health-care waste management. Some countries may choose to develop their own regulations and practices; others may elect to use the information provided in this handbook as the basis for their policies and for guidance. The intended readership includes public health managers, hospital managers and other administrators of health-care establishments, policy-makers, regulators, waste managers, and environmental health professionals.

Health-care waste management, as well as posing technical problems, is strongly influenced by cultural, social, and economic circumstances. A well designed waste policy, a legislative framework, and plans for achieving local implementation are essential. Change will be gradual and should be technically and financially sustainable in the long term.

Hospitals and other health-care establishments have a “duty of care” for the environment and for public health, and have particular responsibilities in relation to the waste they produce. The onus is on such establishments to ensure that there are no adverse health and environmental consequences of their waste handling, treatment, and disposal activities. By implementing a health-care waste management policy, including the components outlined in this handbook, medical and research facilities are moving toward the achievement of a healthy and safe environment for their employees and communities.

It should be understood that this handbook does not specifically address the management of wastes from animal health-care/veterinary establishments: any reference to animal waste deals only with that resulting from the use of animals in research into human medicine.