

**POLICY GUIDANCE  
FOR HANDLING RADIOACTIVE MEDICAL WASTE  
AT OFFSITE FACILITIES**

February 12, 2013

Offsite medical waste transfer and treatment facilities are required to monitor medical waste for radioactivity prior to treatment as part of their operational plans. These procedures shall be followed for worker and public health protection.

1. Set the radioactive detection equipment to alarm at a level of three times (3X) background.
2. On the days when medical waste is going to be treated, test the radiation equipment with a known radiation source and take action as necessary to ensure that the alarm is operating when a radiation level of three times background is reached. If a movable radiation detector is used to scan the medical waste containers for radiation, the scanning should be done within six inches from the sides of the container.
3. An area away from workers shall be maintained for the isolation of medical waste that has caused the radiation detection equipment to alarm.
4. **Any container of medical waste that causes the radiation detection equipment to alarm must be given special handling considerations.** If the waste reads **greater than** three times the background level, **but less than** 1,000 micro R per hour or equivalent, the treatment facility shall set the waste aside in the isolation area for 48 hours then re-scan it for radiation activity. If the re-scan indicates that the radioactivity has decayed to a level of three times background or less, the medical waste can be treated. If the readings continue to be above three times background after 48 hours, the Radiologic Health Branch **and** the Medical Waste Management Program of the California Department of Public Health shall be notified and further directions shall be provided, including the possibility of holding the waste for further decay.
5. If a container of medical waste reads **equal to or greater than** 1,000 micro R per hour or equivalent, the facility shall immediately be set aside in the isolation area. The generator, Radiologic Health Branch, and the Medical Waste Management Program of the California Department of Public Health shall be notified immediately and further instructions will be provided.

This guidance is being issued in an effort to ensure that both the Radiologic Health Branch and the Medical Waste Management Program are properly notified for radiation alarms incidents at offsite facilities. The phone numbers for notifying the Radiologic Health Branch and the Medical Waste Management Program are as follows:

Radiologic Health Branch  
Mr. John Fassell (916) 445-2196

Medical Waste Management Program  
Ms. Alison Dabney (916) 449-5692

Should you have any questions regarding this revised policy guidance, please contact me at (916) 449-5692 or via email at [alison.dabney@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:alison.dabney@cdph.ca.gov).

Alison Dabney, Chief  
Medical Waste Management Program

