



California Conference
of Directors of
Environmental Health



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**
Northern California
Chapter



California Sharps Coalition

*Enriching Lives by Building Resources,
Increasing Safe Needle Disposal &
Supporting Education*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 10, 2010

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**Sen. Joe Simitian, Consumer Health Organizations
Present "Report Card" Criteria to Evaluate Drug
Manufacturers' Response to SB 486 Safe Needle
Disposal Plan Requirements
*California the First State to Require Manufacturers
to Help Customer.***

Sacramento – Representatives of the National MS Society, the Diabetes Coalition of California, the California Conference of Environmental Health Directors and other consumer health organizations joined today with Sen. Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) to present criteria they will use to evaluate safe needle disposal plans prepared by drug manufacturers, as required by Simitian's SB 486 (Ch.591/09).

With enactment of SB 486 last fall, California became the first state in the nation to require drug manufacturers to submit plans that provide for the safe disposal of used needles.

"For anyone with a family member who takes insulin or other medical injections, this law will seem long overdue," Simitian said. "We tell patients they can't throw sharps away, but haven't provided an easy, safe solution. The net effect is that roughly one million Californians are 'lawbreakers' with no practical alternative.

"My bill takes a modest first step toward a solution," said Simitian, "by requiring that if pharmaceutical manufacturers sell a medication in this state that is 'intended to be self-injected at home', they must provide a plan that describes what they are doing to support the safe disposal of needles that deliver their products."

What Makes for a Good Plan? "The question is: what makes for a good plan?" asked Simitian.

He continued: "This is where the dedicated supporters of SB 486 come in. The same people who work day in and day out to provide support and information to seriously ill patients relying on self-injected medication have developed a report card format

that is simple and concise. It will help consumers make informed choices, and provide critical feedback to the pharmaceutical manufacturers.”

A coalition of consumer and public health groups supporting SB 486 set up an Evaluation Team to establish criteria to evaluate the safe needle disposal plans that drug manufacturers are required to submit to the State “CalRecycle” Department by July 1, 2010. The Team convened three times over a two-month period to discuss criteria that they would use to grade the effectiveness of a manufacturer’s plan.

Free and Convenient Statewide Disposal Program Essential. “We identified criteria in four areas that we know are important to the patients that we work with. Then we assigned values to each of those areas,” said Ralph Cyr, a member of the Northern California Chapter of the National MS Society. “That way, there’s no mistaking the most important things that a drug company could do to help their customers.

“In our grading criteria, setting up a free, statewide safe needle disposal strategy is the highest priority, worth 80 points – about a B-,” he said.

The criteria suggest several alternatives for a statewide program, including manufacturer-sponsored needle mail-back programs, or collaborating with drug store chains to take back used needles in secure, FDA-approved containers. Other management strategies identified in US EPA guidance would also qualify for points.

Companies can improve their “grades” by implementing additional, related programs, including patient and public education programs, coordinating with local agencies, and working with local consumer and community groups.

“We also welcome the input of the drug manufacturers,” said Beverly Thomassian, Diabetes Nurse Specialist with the Diabetes Coalition of California. “Some manufacturers are already working on programs to safely dispose of used needles.”

The Evaluation Team plans to convene again in July, and use these criteria to grade the effectiveness of the drug manufacturers’ plans.

Background. More than one million Californians today -- about one out of every 12 households --rely on self-injected medications to manage serious medical conditions: diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B & C, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, migraines, hemophilia, infertility osteoporosis, serious allergies and other medical conditions.

Statewide, approximately 389 million sharps are generated each year. Those numbers are expected to sharply increase in future years, with approximately 1.6 million new adult diabetes cases diagnosed nationwide each year, and reliance on home-injected medication increasing for many serious illnesses.

Currently, many needles end up in household trash and pose a significant risk of injury and/or infection to children, hotel workers, janitors and solid waste employees. The lack of convenient, affordable disposal alternatives makes almost one million Californians in violation of current law.