



Environmental Health Division • Public Information

County of Ventura • Resource Management Agency • <http://ventura.org/rma/envhealth>
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MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM STEAM STERILIZATION (AUTOCLAVE) GUIDELINES

In accordance with Section 118215(c) of the Medical Waste Management Act of the California Health and Safety Code, medical waste treatment by steam sterilization (autoclave) shall be in accordance with the following operating procedures:

1. Standard written operating procedures shall be established for biological indicators including time, temperature, pressure, type of waste, type of container, closure on container, pattern of loading, water content, and maximum load quantity. The operating procedures supplied by the autoclave manufacturer are acceptable.
2. Recording or indicating thermometers shall be checked during each complete cycle to ensure attainment of 121°C (250°F) for at least 30 minutes, depending on the quantity and density of the load. Thermometers shall be checked for calibration annually. Maintain records of calibration checks for 3 years.
3. Heat-sensitive tape, or other acceptable method, shall be used on each container that is processed to indicate attainment of adequate sterilization conditions. The universal temperature and time conditions are 121°C or 250°F for 15 minutes. Indicators may be in tape form or strips which turn color or autoclave labels in which the word "AUTOCLAVED" appears when these conditions have been attained.
4. Autoclave bags may be used instead of heat-sensitive tape or labels on containers. Autoclave bags are orange or red-orange in color, and the word "AUTOCLAVED" turns black when adequate sterilization conditions are attained. Clear autoclave bags may be used provided they are lined with a red biohazardous waste bag.
5. The biological indicator Bacillus stearothermophilus shall be placed at the center of the load processed under standard operating conditions at least monthly to confirm the attainment of adequate sterilization conditions. These indicators may be ampules or strips (i.e., Kilit, Spordex) which contain spores that are incubated after sterilization. A color change occurs to indicate whether growth occurs following sterilization.
6. Maintain records of operations for 3 years. The attached Operation Record of Medical Waste Treatment forms may be copied for use. These records serve as tracking documents and are the only verification that your medical waste has been properly treated. Additional forms are available from the Environmental Health Division.
7. Steam sterilization of medical waste renders it solid waste at which time it may be disposed of in solid waste receptacles. The autoclaved bags or containers shall retain the indicator tape, labels, or bag markings that indicate the medical waste had been adequately treated.