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## Report Summary

### *Why audit medical waste?*

Medical waste is a small fraction of municipal waste stream. They are considered as special wastes wherein it requires careful management due to its inherent characteristics and compositions. Unlike solid waste, medical wastes are highly infectious and need special treatment before being disposed off or incinerated. According to WHO, approximately 10% of medical wastes are infectious while another 5% are hazardous. Besides such health hazards, proper management of medical waste could also aid in the respective municipalities' effort in keeping the town clean.

With the pace of development in the country, several new hospitals are being built while the existing ones are being upgraded. The Phuentsholing town boasts of a new hospital while Thimphu residents are eagerly waiting for the new 350 bedded hospital. Therefore, the Royal Audit Authority (RAA) found it appropriate and timely to conduct a proper study of medical wastes generated by the above two hospitals. The study was conducted mainly from the perspective of performance auditing.

Besides, the findings and recommendations from this study could also be spread over and replicated to many other hospitals and Basic Health Units which are located in other parts of the country.

The main objectives of this audit were:

- To see whether the composition and quantities of wastes generated were recorded;
- To see the existence of waste management system and assess their effectiveness;
- To identify opportunities for improving the current waste management system.

## ***What RAA found?***

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Royal Audit Authority took up the study of the medical wastes generated by Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) in Thimphu and Phuentsholing General Hospital. The review of policy documents and files, observations, walk-through tests, questionnaires and interviews revealed that there were several issues common to both the hospitals, with few specific ones. Accordingly, the findings have been categorized as common and specific to each hospital.

The overall findings of the RAA have been briefly summarised as hereunder;

- The composition and the quantities of wastes generated by the hospitals have not been documented;
- Although general guidelines on managing medical wastes exist, they were not transformed into rules and regulations. Therefore, the accountability in managing medical waste is generally lacking.
- Management of waste was often thought to be a secondary assignment by the hospital staff. In a questionnaire response, many felt that a dedicated team should be appointed if medical waste has to be managed properly;
- There was lack of knowledge and awareness amongst the cleaners and ward persons on the management of medical waste. Many of them were found handling wastes without protective gears. Laboratories workers were provided with protective gears which could not fully protect them from work hazards.
- Autoclaving of waste at JDWNRH was found to be done in a normal waste containing polythene bag instead of specially designed autoclaving bags.
- No procedures were in place to deal complaints and cases related to the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Hospital Acquired Infections (HAI);
- The hospital managements felt that since waste management is not their core function, it often did not get the budgetary support from the government.

***What RAA  
recommends?***

With the construction and upgradation of several hospitals and BHUs in Bhutan, managing medical waste in most scientific manner cannot be ignored. If appropriate steps are not taken now, the problem might

become unmanageable in future.

In view of this and based on the study, the RAA tried to provide certain recommendations in the proper management of medical wastes. The recommendations put forth by the RAA are the outcome of the audit conducted within a particular period and based on the information provided at that point of time. The recommendations have been summarised as given hereunder;

- The compositions and quantities of waste generated from the individual hospitals should be properly documented for future studies related to medical wastes;
- The Ministry of Health needs to formulate rules and regulations in line with the policy document for Solid Waste Management 2006.
- The Ministry should also form a dedicated team to monitor the implementation of the rules and regulations. The present Committee were not able to dedicate enough time for monitoring.
- More structured training and awareness programmes need to be organised for people handling medical waste, especially the ward persons and cleaners.
- Patients and their attendants need to be made aware of the concerns and problems associated with medical waste, through awareness sign boards and brochures.
- National Environment Commission (NEC), as a nodal agency for environment, need to backstop hospital management in technical aspects of waste management and monitor their effectiveness from time to time.