

Medical Waste Management Practices in North Eastern Free State, South Africa

Pululu Sexton Mahasa¹ and Tabukeli Musigi Ruhiiga²

¹*Department of Geography, Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, Qwaqwa Campus,
University of the Free State, Private Bag X13, Phuthadijhaba 9866, South Africa*

²*Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, School of Environmental and Health
Sciences, Mafikeng Campus, North West University, Private Bag X20146,
Mmabatho 2735, South Africa*

¹*Telephone: (+27) 58 718 5036, Fax: (+27) 58 718 5055*

¹*E-mail: mahasapululusexton@gmail.com, mahasaps@qwa.ufs.ac.za*

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ABSTRACT This paper presents a study undertaken to investigate the state of medical waste management practices in different hospitals in the north eastern Free State Province, South Africa. A random sample of ten (10) hospitals was selected. A stratified random sample of 138 staff members spread across the ten medical facilities was selected and face-to-face interviews were conducted. Observation of operations was carried out over a period of six months. Data collection through observation and interviews covered waste generation, storage, handling, transportation, treatment and management procedures. Data analysis made use of SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, correlations and hypothesis testing. The findings reveal that medical personnel do not treat medical waste as specified in official guidelines, there is no formal training for personnel, medical waste is not a key priority, low levels of environmental awareness, inappropriate treatment of waste at some sites, and inadequate budget allocations for medical waste management. These findings indicate that there is an urgent need for addressing issues of awareness for managers, better on-the job training for personnel, better systems for on-ward conveyance of waste from facilities to official medical waste treatment plants, an up-grade of existing incinerators and the enforcement of procedures for waste data collection.