Medical Waste Treatment and Disposal Equipment in Canada

U.S. Commercial Service Canada

Summary

The Canadian medical waste treatment and disposal equipment market is expected to grow significantly over the next five to ten years, as the Baby Boomer generation continues to age and the demand for medical care and attention continues to increase. As the national provider of health care services, the Government of Canada (GOC) is placing a strong emphasis on procurement of cost effective medical waste treatment and disposal equipment that will also reduce environmental contamination and pollution in the long term. Utilizing such technology and equipment is a high priority in Canada, as is evident by the increased use of hydroclaves and reusable sharps containers. Currently, U.S. manufactured autoclaves are among the most popular types of equipment used for medical waste treatment and disposal in Canada.

Canada’s is committed to moving away from pollution causing medical waste treatment and disposal procedures, such as incinerators that have been used by hospitals and other medical facilities. This effort opens significant opportunities for other non-polluting technologies and equipment that will help reduce emissions and serve to advance higher environmental standards.

The Canadian Standards Association and Environment Canada set the standards and regulations for the disposal of hazardous and medical waste materials; and offer guidelines that will be of interest to U.S. suppliers interested in penetrating the Canadian marketplace.

Market Demand

Currently, Canada is home to approximately 3,000 hospitals, medical facilities and surgery centers that require medical waste treatment and disposal. The Ministry of Health is the largest provider of health care services in Canada’s provinces and territories and is responsible for the procurement of medical waste products as well as setting disposal regulations.
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), high-income countries, such as Canada, can generate up to six kg (13.23 pounds) of hazardous waste, including medical waste, per person, per year. Statistics Canada reported that by 2004, Canada had produced 30 million tons of hazardous and medical waste. Although no new waste management statistics have been recorded since 2004, hazardous and medical waste tonnage is believed to have increased annually. In particular, there has been an increase in medical waste, as a result of the ageing Baby Boomer population requiring more medical attention.

The categories of biomedical waste in Canada are:

- anatomic (15%, with isolation waste included)
- microbiologic/laboratory (3% with pharmaceuticals and chemical)
- blood/body fluid and sharps (1% of total health care waste)

Sterilization and disposal methods for biomedical waste are: landfills, sanitary sewers, steam sterilization (autoclaving, hydroclaving), chemical decontamination (electron beam), microwave processing and incineration. A common belief by Canadian citizens is that medical waste poses a higher infection risk than household waste, despite evidence that household waste is 100 times more poisonous. In 1992 the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment prepared the Guidelines for the Management of Biomedical Waste in Canada, to promote uniform practices and set national standards for managing biomedical waste in Canada.

Environment Canada and the Canadian authorities prefer sterilization procedures that do not produce emissions and can reduce waste volume and weight. Hydroclaving and autoclaving are the preferred methods of sterilization, with landfills and sanitary sewers as the final disposal method. The safe and effective sterilization of pathogens (found in medical waste) is a top priority for the GOC as well as environmental groups around the world. Achieving a reduction in, and improved management of, hazardous medical waste are important goals for the medical and environmental sectors in Canada.

Therefore, the Canadian market for medical waste treatment and disposal equipment is moving toward reusable containers and their sterilization to reduce the amount of plastic containers polluting the environment. The reusable containers are also less likely to be pierced by sharps and they provide a way of keeping track of medical waste products and their final location when handled by waste management providers.
The medical waste management industry is expected to remain stable due to the solid grip on the market by Stericycle. The only forecasted increase in the industry will be as a result of the Baby Boomer generation reaching the age where medical care becomes a necessity, as well as their growing interest in gerontology for the prolonging of life.

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