

New Health Department program reduces harmful waste

COLUMBIA, MO (August 7, 2008) - The Columbia/Boone County Health Department's new Red Box program begins tomorrow. The program, which will significantly decrease the amount of used syringes, needles and lancets (also called "sharps") placed in local landfills, is the brainchild of Environmental Health Specialist Kris Vellema.

Through the Red Box program, the Health Department will distribute free sharps disposal containers for patients to fill at home. When the container is full, participants return it to the Health Department for proper disposal.

While primary users will include diabetic patients, the program is open to any citizen who uses sharps at home, including those treating allergies, arthritis, cancer, diabetes, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, infertility, migraines, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis and psoriasis.

A similar program in an Indiana county removed approximately 45,000 sharps from the solid waste stream in just one year. In addition to alleviating landfill waste, Red Box will help keep city refuse collectors safe from accidental needle sticks as they collect household trash.

Vellema's idea was chosen from a field of 10 by the city's Executive Safety Committee for the P.R.I.D.E. Safety Program award, administered through the city's Risk Management department. The program will provide initial funding for the implementation of Red Box.

The Health Department will distribute free sharps containers Monday - Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Health Department clinic, 1005 West Worley in Columbia.

For more information about other Columbia/Boone County Health Department programs and services, visit www.GoColumbiaMo.com (<http://www.gocolumbiamo.com/>).