

Transportation Guidance - Ebola Contaminated Medical Waste

Given the national attention to the on-going Ebola situation, I wanted provide some background information about how Ebola contaminated medical waste is handled in transportation. The waste is considered a "Category A" infectious substance, which is the highest risk level, and considered a hazardous material. The Category A designation requires more stringent packaging and other requirements.

While the federal hazardous materials regulations have very specific requirements for infectious substances, the regulations were developed principally for small quantity shipments (lab samples, cultures, etc.) As result of the recent incidents involving confirmed cases of Ebola infections, the medical waste that has been generated (sheets, sharps, basins, PPE, etc.) have required larger containers and packages, requiring transporters to have a "special permit" to move this material. The special permit specifies how the materials are prepared and packaged prior to transportation.

A permit was issued to a medical waste transporter in Texas to address the issues in the Dallas area. A type of permit has also been developed to allow the transportation of Ebola medical waste in other areas of the US should it become necessary. Medical waste contaminated with Ebola is either treated in an autoclave or incinerated at a facility approved to accept and process this type of waste. Some medical facilities will have this capability on-site and will not require transportation. Facilities that do not have on-site incineration or autoclave capability will need to have the material transported.

PHMSA has developed guidelines for medical facilities and other locations that may have Ebola medical waste as a result of patient or other person that with confirmed or suspected Ebola infection. I wanted to provide this information to hazmat response personnel for situational awareness.

The guidance posted to the PHMSA website:

<http://phmsa.dot.gov/hazmat/transporting-infectious-substances>