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Griswold: Tulare County, cities mandate 'sharps' drop-off boxes

By Lewis Griswold

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Anne Magana, manager of the Consolidated Waste Management Authority in Tulare County, demonstrates how to use a medical sharps disposal kiosk on Wednesday, July 2, 2014.

LEWIS GRISWOLD — The Fresno Bee

Proper disposal of needles and syringes has long been a vexing problem for people who use them to administer medication at home.

"We have so many people who have stored them for years" because there's no cheap, easy way to dispose of them, said Anne Magana, manager of the Consolidated Waste Management Authority.

Until now, that is.

Tulare County and seven of eight cities in the county have passed ordinances requiring any business that sells "medical sharps" -- pharmacies, veterinary offices, feed stores and pet stores, for example -- to install a free disposal station.

"If you purchase from a retailer, they are responsible for disposal," Magana said.

The disposal station, or kiosk, resembles a mailbox.

Needles must be in a certified container. Several types of containers are sold at pharmacies or online and cost \$2.50 to \$20 or more, depending on size.

The container is placed into a drawer, the user slides the drawer shut and the container drops in.

A medical waste disposal company takes it from there.

It's against the law to throw sharps -- needles, lancets, injection pens, pen needles or any device used to penetrate the skin to deliver medication -- into regular garbage, green waste or recyclables, or flush them down the toilet.

Some people mail their containers to a disposal company for a fee, and some companies will pick them up for a fee.

In Tulare County, free drop-off events have been held from time to time. One was held last month in Tulare and enough sharps were collected to fill nearly six 38-gallon containers.

One person showed up with a single container and rushed home to get more, Magana said.

The next free drop-off is from 2 to 6 p.m. Thursday at 250 N. Tipton St. in Visalia, and from 8 a.m. to noon July 19 at the Porterville corporation yard, 555 N. Prospect St.

In Fresno County, the new household hazardous waste facility at 18590 W. American Ave., slated to open this fall, will have weekly drop-off for sharps containers from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays.

Leslie Kline, recycling coordinator for Fresno County, said the county is also trying to set up a network of disposal kiosks by asking pharmacies and others to participate.

HOLLISTER OR BUST: Donnette Silva Carter, president and CEO of the Porterville Chamber of Commerce for 17 years, is leaving the chamber for understandable reasons. Her last day is July 31.

Carter is moving to Hollister to join her husband Joe, who is employed in the area.

She's been hired by the 33rd District Agricultural Association, San Benito County Fair and Bolado Park Event Center as chief executive officer and fair manager.

Succeeding Carter will be Deborah Sierra, director of membership and special events.

TULARE FAIR: Tulare County Fair general manager Pamela Fyock is asking civic clubs, schools, youth groups, churches and businesses to pre-sell wristbands as a fundraiser for the group and to support the fair.

Wristbands give the wearer a one-day pass to the carnival and Kiddie Lane, including unlimited rides. They sell for \$20; the selling organization earns \$1.50 per wristband.

This is the earliest that carnival wristbands have been put on sale -- all part of Fyock's strategy to generate enthusiasm.

So far, 25 organizations in Tulare, Visalia, Pixley, Porterville, Lindsay and Exeter have the wristbands for sale or will have them, the fair said.

The Tulare County Fair runs Sept. 10-14.

Information: (559) 686-4707.

Lewis Griswold covers the news of Tulare and Kings counties for The Bee. His column runs Sunday. He can be reached at (559) 441-6104, lgriswold@fresnobee.com or [@fb_LewGriswold](https://twitter.com/fb_LewGriswold) on Twitter.

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