

A new report by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and toxic waste, Calin Georgescu, says the international community has to date paid little attention to the growing problem of medical waste around the world, despite the threat it poses to millions of people and the environment.

“Some 20 to 25 per cent of the total waste generated by health-care establishments is regarded as hazardous and may create a variety of health and environmental risks if not managed and disposed of in an appropriate manner,” warns the independent expert designated by the UN Human Rights Council to report on the adverse effects of the movement and dumping of toxic and dangerous products and wastes on the enjoyment of human rights.

Hazardous health-care waste includes infectious waste, sharps, anatomical and pathological waste, obsolete or expired chemical products and pharmaceuticals, and radioactive materials. Medical waste is often mixed with general household waste, and either disposed of in municipal waste facilities or dumped illegally.

“A significant number of people – including medical staff, patients, workers in support services linked to health-care facilities, workers in waste disposal facilities, recyclers, scavengers and the general public – are potentially at risk of injury or contamination through accidental exposure to health-care waste,” Mr. Georgescu stresses.

The report notes that, significant challenges persist in many countries with regard to the proper management and disposal of health-care waste. “The amount of waste generated by healthcare facilities in developing countries is increasing owing to the expansion of health-care systems and services,” the Special Rapporteur says. In his view, this situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate technological and financial resources to ensure that health-care waste is managed and disposed of in a manner that is safe for human health and the environment. (...)

The article:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11375&LangID=E>

The Report:

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/18session/A-HRC-18-31_en.pdf