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## Policy and legislation linked to COVID-19 and pandemics

**NO UNCONTROLLED DUMPING,  
NO OPEN BURNING**

Protect the environment and our health

For more information visit [unep.org](http://unep.org) or contact **Kevin Helps** (Head, GEF Unit, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP) [kevin.helps@un.org](mailto:kevin.helps@un.org)

*"Strong laws and institutions are essential for countries to respond to COVID-19 related waste management challenges in a manner that avoids negative, long-term health and environmental effects"*

Arnold Kreilhuber, Acting Director of Law Division, UNEP

### The problem

Guidance on policy and legislation will help countries to have a stable legal and institutional basis to better respond to future waste emergencies such as the COVID-19, and to clarify measures to be taken.

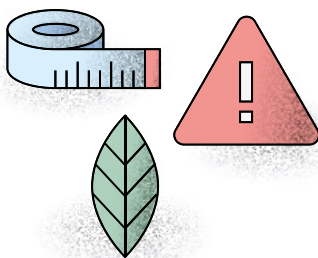


- 1 Cover gaps in national medical waste management policy and legislation linked to emergency pandemic situations, such as COVID-19.
- 2 Prioritise in-country management of COVID-19 waste over other waste streams. The pandemic is causing increases in medical waste generation, whose unsound management can lead to environmental and health hazards.
- 3 Monitor any increased import and/or export of COVID-19 waste (in case of lack of capacity to treat in-country and close to the source) and avoid dumping.  
For more information, check the Factsheet on inventory.

### Guidance

Themes countries should consider

#### (a) Type of instrument and legal basis

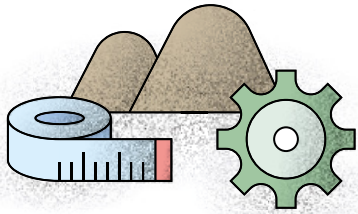


Does national legislation, such as on waste management, include provisions authorizing the expedited adoption of short-term/emergency measures needed for a pandemic?

What type of instrument is chosen for adopting emergency measures?

**Any measures adopted to deal with the situation should be temporary and include safeguards for their automatic review/clear grounds of extension.**

## (b) Coverage/scope of measures adopted



What are the type and the origin (from healthcare or households) of waste covered by the measures?

What are the technology and type of process used for waste management (segregation, collection, transportation, stockpiling, disinfection, storage, treatment, elimination)?

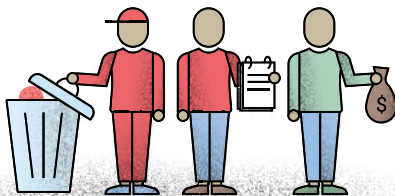
What are the additional measures to monitor the export/import of increased quantities of potentially COVID-19-contaminated/hazardous waste in accordance with national legislation and international agreements?

Which are the institutions responsible (operators and professionals) for the different steps of the waste management process? How can policy and legislation enable them to carry out their work effectively in a crisis situation (for example through expedited procedures for accreditation or issuance and renewal of licenses)?

What are the necessary measures to prevent negative effects on the environment and/or to restore the environment in case it was damaged by increased volumes of waste and by the application of the measures?

**Observance of international norms (treaty obligations, such as under the Basel Convention, and identified best practice, such as the [WHO guidance on the safe management of wastes from health-care activities](#)) is key.**

## (c) Monitoring, compliance and enforcement



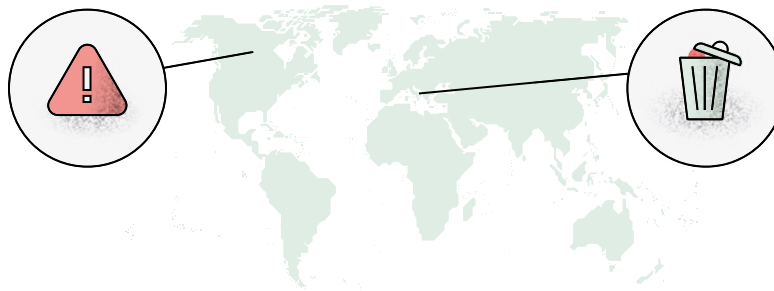
What are the reporting obligations of those responsible for carrying out the waste management process (e.g. operators)?

Which state institutions are responsible for monitoring the waste management measures and the state of the environment, and the implementation and enforcement of the related legal requirements? How can coordination amongst the different institutions be enhanced?

What are the economic tools employed to promote compliance (such as tax incentives and subsidies)?

## Facts

The Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA, 1999) empowers the Governor in Council to make [regulations on environmental emergencies](#).



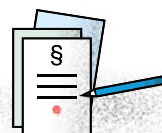
Italy issued a [guidance](#) on the management of municipal waste from households affected by COVID-19 and those not affected.

## Way forward

UNEP should analyze the measures taken by different countries and identify best practices and lessons learned. The goal is to:



Assist countries in assessing the effectiveness of the measures.

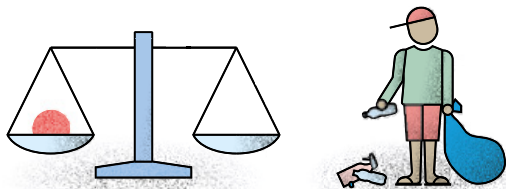


Consider revision of their legislation, as needed, to make it more agile to deal with similar future situations, without compromising the state of the environment.

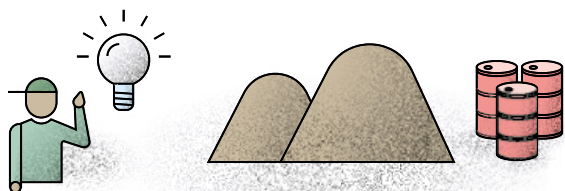
# UNEP Chemicals Special Programme

Established after the First United Nations Environment Assembly, the UNEP Chemicals Special Programme supports eligible countries to strengthen their national institutions, enabling them to soundly manage their chemicals and waste and to meet the international obligations through the development and

**Project activities under the Programme would relate to:**

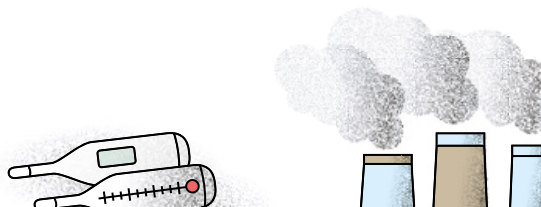


Developing or reviewing national legislation about the collection and treatment of healthcare and household waste, for protecting waste management workers and collectors, and about about transboundary movement of hazardous waste.



Raising awareness and increasing the knowledge on the positive impact of the sound management of chemicals and waste.

implementation of policies, legislation and regulation. During and post COVID-19, the UNEP Chemicals Special Programme can help developing projects addressing existing systemic weaknesses and gaps related to the sound management of chemicals and waste that the pandemic brought to light.



Assessing regulatory needs to eliminate the manufacture, import and export of products containing mercury, and developing regulations on air pollution control for mercury-emitting sectors.



Conducting training for frontline health and waste management practitioners on safe handling of hazardous and infectious health care waste.