

《Police bust illegal medical waste processing ring in C. Chin》

More than 140 tons of plastic medical waste, including used IV bags, urinary drainage bags and even syringes, have been reprocessed into other plastic products by a criminal ring in central China's Hunan Province. The reprocessed products were later sold on to locations across the country, reported Outlook News Magazine.

Twelve people, including suspects responsible for supplying the used medical waste, reprocessing and selling the products from Hunan, Hubei, Hebei and Jiangsu provinces, have been charged with "polluting the environment."

During the investigation, police officers were particularly concerned with the fact that products made from reprocessed hazardous and even toxic materials were sold on to food companies, the home renovation industry and even hospitals.



Officials investigating the illegal processing of medical waste in Hunan Province./ Outlook News Magazine

Describing the yard where the medical waste was processed, officials called the scene shocking. The suspects were caught manually sorting through the waste, with foul-smelling liquid flowing everywhere. There were syringe needles coated in blood, said one officer, and the suspects were not even wearing masks, said Xu Shuli from the local environment emergency center.

In April, the Environment Protection Bureau of Miluo City, Hunan Province, received reports of an illegal medical waste processing ring, and seized over 50 tons of such waste and reprocessed products.



Medical waste seized by officials./Outlook News Magazine

Throughout the process, the waste was reintroduced to the market without undergoing any sterilization.

To make more money, potentially infectious pieces of medical waste such as syringes were reprocessed. According to the suspects, used medical supplies were purchased at a price of 2,000 yuan (294 US dollars) per ton. After being sorted, cleaned and broken up, the reprocessed plastic could be sold on at a price of 5,000 yuan (735 US dollars) per ton.

Much of the medical waste involved in the case came from public hospitals, including tier-one hospitals in Hunan Province.



Medical waste seized by officials./Outlook News Magazine

As required by law, hospital waste needs to be sorted by property management companies and distributed to qualified companies to be further processed. However, some hospitals and waste management companies are turning a blind eye to medical staff selling on used supplies to boost their relatively low salaries.

According to Xu, medical waste must be handled with great caution, because of the high risk of acute infection. Without being properly processed, the waste could go on to become a source of diseases.