How to Pick up Discarded Syringes

The Problem:
• Injection drug users can litter syringes on public property. Syringes can also clog manholes and pipes in sewage treatment plants.
• Used syringes can contain blood which can be infectious.
• Clean-up workers can be exposed to HIV, Hepatitis-C or Hepatitis-B if they are stuck by a used syringe. Clean-up workers should avoid all skin contact with syringes.

How to Clean-up Syringes
• Bring gloves, pliers and a sharps container to the location of litter.
• Put on puncture resistant gloves. Put leather gloves over healthcare gloves if you are reaching into pipes or manholes.
• Do not touch the syringe with your hands.
• Use pliers to pick up the syringe.
• Put the syringe immediately into a Sharps Disposal Container. Place the syringe needle-first into the container.
• Do not walk across the park to get to the sharps container, bring the container with you. Do not hand the syringe to another person.
• Do not recap the needle. If a syringe was already capped, keep the cap on, still use pliers, and still discard in a Sharps Disposal Container.
• Spray pliers with dilute bleach solution to disinfect. Wipe with a paper towel or air dry. The paper towel can go into regular trash.
• Remove your gloves, and discard in plastic trash bag.
• Wash hands, or use alcohol gel to clean your hands as soon as possible.
• Keep the sharps disposal container in a secure location. This must be disposed as biohazard waste.

Who Can Do This Clean-up
• Worker must be trained initially and annually in Bloodborne Pathogens.
• Worker must be trained in use and hazards of chemical disinfectant.
• Worker must be offered the Hepatitis-B vaccine before they are assigned to syringe clean-up.
• Worker must be provided with gloves, pliers, disinfectant, sharps disposal containers, alcohol gel hand disinfectant, and access to a sink.
• Worker must know where to seek immediate medical follow-up if they get a needlestick.
• If a worker gets a cut or needlestick from a used syringe, seek medical attention at your local hospital as soon as possible. The clinic will evaluate the risk for transmission of HIV and Hepatitis, and may recommend medication. The medication is most effective within the first 24 hours.