

FACT SHEET



FS No. 37-078-1120

MANAGEMENT OF USED SHARPS

BACKGROUND

Used sharps (such as needles, scalpels, syringes, and so forth) pose a risk to both healthcare workers and patients because of bloodborne pathogens such as Hepatitis B and the HIV virus. Hepatitis B can remain viable for an extended period of time outside of the body while the HIV virus is considerably more fragile outside of the body. In a hospital environment, needle-sticks from used sharps are the easiest and surest method of transferring these pathogens into a new host (YOU). It is for this reason that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has published regulations on the management and disposal of used sharps (Title 29 Code of Federal Regulation 1910-1030(d)(2)(vii-viii)).

USED SHARPS

The majority of needle sticks occur during sharps disposal according to the Joint Commission. Therefore, the recommended policy is to **NOT** recap, clip, break, and/or destroy sharps. Always discard used sharps intact into the sharps container. If recapping is unavoidable, use a mechanical device or the one-handed scoop technique.

SHARPS CONTAINERS

Use a container that is made from a rigid and impervious material, such as plastic, and designed so that sharps will not be able to be retrieved once they are placed in the receptacle.

Clearly label the sharps container to indicate that the contents are regulated medical waste (RMW) consisting of sharps (include the international biohazard symbol).

Secure the sharps container to the wall with a locking mechanism or place in an area that is locked or under constant visual supervision by healthcare personnel.

DISPOSAL

A sharps container is considered full when two thirds to three fourths of the container is filled (consult your local hospital medical waste management regulation for definition of full). The sharps container must be sealed before removing it from the point of generation to prevent spillage in the event of mishandling.

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Transport within the medical treatment facility (MTF). Sharps containers should be transported upright in a rigid, easily cleanable cart or properly sealed RMW shipping container along established routes used to transport other RMW.

Transport outside of the MTF. If the sharps container(s) is to be transported to an off-post treatment site, it must be tracked in the same fashion as other RMW.

On-site Treatment and disposal. Sharps containers must be rendered noninfectious before final disposal. If the treatment process does not render the contents of the container unrecognizable (unusable), the container must be secured to prevent reuse of the sharps while they await final disposal.

Many states stipulate that the sharps must be rendered unrecognizable before final disposal. Some states, in their RMW regulations, have a definition of unrecognizable as less than 1/2 inch in length. Check to see if your state regulates the size of destroyed sharps.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For safety considerations and to prevent unauthorized use, unused sharps slated for disposal should be discarded into sharps containers and managed as RMW.

Do not use the sharps container to dispose PII. Not all sharps containers are incinerated for treatment and/or disposal so the PII would not be destroyed.

ASSISTANCE

Contact U.S. Army Public Health Center, Environmental Health Sciences Division at 410-436-3651 or usarmy.apg.medcom-aphc.mbx.hmwp@mail.mil for additional assistance.
