

Handling and Disposal of Laboratory Sharps

Sharps include items that may be especially hazardous such as hypodermic intravenous, or other needles and syringes; Pasteur pipettes; scalpel or razor blades; blood vials; glass microscope slides and coverslips; and any other broken laboratory glassware and must be handled with special precautions.

How do I handle sharps?

Sharps that are contaminated with Biohazardous agents or radioactive materials must be disposed of separately from non-contaminated sharps. Biohazardous contaminated sharps may be autoclaved before disposal with non-contaminated sharps.

Do not put any sharps into normal trash receptacles including plastic pipettes.

Sharp containers are closable, puncture resistant, leak-proof on the sides and bottoms, and available in 1-quart, 2-gallon, and 8-gallon sizes. Sharps disposal containers must be easily accessible to laboratory personnel and located as close as feasible to the area where sharps are used. When discarding sharps:

- Never bend, shear, break, or recap disposable needles or remove from disposable syringes.
- Immediately following use, place the item into the sharps disposal container.
- Never reach into the sharps disposal container.
- Never empty the contents of the sharps disposal container into another container.
- Never remove the lid from the container.
- Never overfill a sharps disposal container; no materials should be sticking out of the top.
- Never force materials into a sharps disposal container.

***Still not sure?** Call 2-4996 for help concerning the proper handling of any items contaminated with infectious agents.

NEVER dispose of these items in sharps disposal containers: *

- Plastic items (except for syringes)
- Beverage containers (no soda cans!)
- Non-sharp lab glass
- Solvent bottles
- Light bulbs
- Any paper materials
- Pipette tips
- Plastic pipettes
- Aerosol cans or cans of any type
- Scintillation vial
- Any item with liquid (except for blood in vacutainers)

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What should I do with material that will not fit into the sharps disposal container?

Oversized items for disposal, such as a 20-liter flask contaminated with an infectious agent may be carefully boxed for collection and treatment. An ordinary cardboard box can be used to package over-sized sharps as long as it is strong, sturdy, and no larger than a standard box for copy paper (18" x 12" x 9"). Bottom seams on the box should be taped with a good quality tape (library, mailing, or duct tape) and the bottom of the box should be lined with absorbent laboratory bench paper. Flaps should not be folded inside the box. Oversized sharps should be emptied of all liquids and placed carefully into the prepared box. When the box is full, but not overflowing, the lid should be closed and seams secured with good quality tape. The box should be labeled on two sides with the words, "OVERSIZED SHARPS." Materials that are not packed as described above will not be picked up until laboratory personnel properly package them.

For Your Information:

Treatment and Disposal of Biological Materials

All microbiological cultures, stocks, and any potentially infectious material must be decontaminated by an approved decontamination method such as autoclaving prior to disposal. Autoclave bags should be kept in a container labeled with the international biohazard symbol while being filled.

After autoclaving, autoclave bags displaying the biohazard symbol must be overbagged with an opaque trash bag and sealed prior to disposal in the solid/regular waste stream. Clear autoclave bags that do not display the biohazard symbol need not be overbagged post-autoclaving and can be sealed and placed directly in the solid/regular waste stream. Biohazard bags, regardless of use, cannot be placed directly into the solid/regular waste stream.

All human tissues and most animal materials (e.g., carcasses, organs, tissues, etc.) must be incinerated.