

Guidelines for Safe Disposal of Personal Sharps on Campus

Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) would like to remind the campus community that personal sharps must be properly disposed of at all times. Examples of personal sharps include waste needles, syringes, and lancets used in administering personal medications such as insulin and administering medications to treat chronic diseases such as allergies, arthritis, diabetes, hepatitis B & C, hormones, infertility, migraines, multiple sclerosis, osteoporosis, psoriasis, etc. The proper disposal of personal sharps safely reduces pollution to the environment and prevents injury and disease transmission from accidental needle sticks. Individuals who use syringes at home or at work are responsible for ensuring that their used syringes are stored in a way that does not cause a health hazard. Disposing of work/home generated sharps in the municipal solid waste stream (domestic trash) places University employees, contractors, and the campus community at risk for needle stick injuries and infections from accidental exposure to used personal sharps.

General Guidelines

If you live or work on campus and require the use of personal sharps you have several safe disposal options:

- If you have access to a medical facility that accepts personal sharps, either purchase a sharps disposal container from a pharmacy or ask your specialty pharmacy to provide you with a sharps container (these are typically readily available if you receive your medication through the mail).
- Mail-back disposal programs allow home sharps users to mail used sharps to licensed disposal facilities as a safe disposal option. Such programs charge a fee for this service. Check with your healthcare provider or pharmacist if they provide such a service, or you may search the Internet using keywords “sharps mail back”.
- Contact EHS for a free small personal sharps container for use on-campus and dispose of full containers at TU Health Center.
- Fill the container to 3/4 full and close the lid. The lid may also be secured with tape. Do not overfill or force fill the sharps container.



Figure 1. Sharps Container. The container is red and labeled with biohazard symbol to indicate the biological hazards involved. It must retain sharps waste to only $\frac{3}{4}$ full to assure that it closes safely and securely to not harm the user or waste handlers.

- **Use a needle destruction device.** Devices or containers with mechanisms that bend, break, incinerate (destroy by high heat), or shear needles are called sharps needle destruction devices. Previously used only in healthcare facilities, these devices are now available in smaller, less expensive models for home use. If the needle or lancet is destroyed by heat in a destruction device, the remaining syringe and melted metal can be safely disposed of as domestic waste (not the recycling).
- Using a needle cutter that automatically stores the cut needles is also useful while away from home when a disposal container is not available. After the needle has been clipped, the remains of the syringe can be placed into a sharps container. When the needle clipper is full, simply place it in the sharps container and dispose of properly.
- If you are unable or unwilling to dispose of your personal sharps through a medical facility, **DO NOT** use a sharps container. Instead, use an empty plastic laundry detergent bottle with a screw-on lid. In Maryland, it is currently legal to put used sharps that are in a laundry detergent bottle with a lid into the garbage. However, this is highly discouraged, because of the injury and health risks it places on garbage hauler and processing facility workers. It is best to use one of the options previously listed for safe management and disposal of used sharps.
 - Label container **“Do Not Recycle”**.
 - Put the sharps in point-first.
 - Containers more than half-full should be disposed.
 - Store sharps in closed container with the cap intact.
- **NEVER** leave personal sharps anywhere they could injure someone.
- **NEVER** store used sharps in glass bottles, soda bottles, milk jugs, aluminum cans, or coffee cans.
- **NEVER** place containers with used needles or syringes into a recycling bin.
- **NEVER** place loose sharps in the trash.
- **NEVER** place sharps containers with a BIOHAZARD label on the outside of the container in the trash. Labeled Biohazard material is not allowed in the domestic waste stream.
- **NEVER** bring sharps containers to medical facilities if they do not accept them.
- Always keep storage containers for used sharps out of the reach of children.

Resources

For more information on safe personal sharps disposal on campus or to pick up a small, 1-quart personal sharps container for use on campus, please contact EHS at (410) 704-5500.