

West Virginia University Sharps Policy

Purpose

The WVU sharps policy focuses on procedures for proper handling, management, and disposal of sharps. It covers all sharps used with human samples, animals, and other lab procedures. In addition, sharps used with human samples fall under OSHA's Blood Borne Pathogens Standard (29 CFR 1910.1030) Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act. This WVU policy is designed for non-Healthcare workers.

Definitions

Sharps: Sharps are any object, regardless of material, that may be rigid or sharp enough to pierce or lacerate the skin of an individual.

Examples: Needles, knives, glass pipettes, scalpels, capillary tubes, razor blades, suture needles, metal shavings, broken glassware, etc.

Standard Procedures for Handling Sharps

- When planning a project, consideration should be given for using safety-engineered sharps, including needleless systems, self re-sheathing needles, and disposable one-use scalpels
- Plastic ware should be used instead of glassware whenever possible.
- Animals should be properly restrained for injections or other procedures.
- Used needles must not be bent, sheared, or re-capped before disposal
 - Re-capping of used needles may be allowed in certain circumstances when transfer of uncapped needles to the sharps container poses a safety risk. Approval from Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) must be obtained in these cases.
 - Unused capped needles may be removed from a syringe and placed in the sharps container if only the syringe is needed.
 - Bending of un-used needles may only be done with a mechanical device.
- Uncapped sharps should not be left on benchtops, in drawers, or other common areas
- If un-capped sharps must be stored, they must be embedded in Styrofoam or other material to cover the sharp end.
- For sharps involving human materials: OSHA requires that employers evaluate the effectiveness of existing controls and review the feasibility of instituting more advanced engineering controls.

Further, OSHA's Bloodborne Pathogens Standard requires that employers establish a written exposure control plan as well as engineering and work practice controls to eliminate or minimize employee exposure.

Sharps Disposal

- Used disposable sharps must be placed in puncture resistant containers with leak proof bottom and sides for sharps disposal. (Figure 1)
- Sharps containers must be conveniently located as close to the point of use as possible.
- Containers for disposable sharps must be closable, having a lid, flap, door, or other means of closing the container. The container must be kept upright to keep the sharps and any liquids from spilling out.
- Sharps contaminated with biohazardous material must be placed in a sharps container with the biohazard symbol and must be disposed of as infectious medical waste.
- Sharps contaminated with chemicals will need a waste determination to verify if they need to be collected as chemical waste or if they can be disposed of as infectious medical waste. To obtain a waste determination, email: ehs_chemicals@mail.wvu.edu
- For sharps contaminated with radiation, contact radiation safety for more information: radiationsafety@hsc.wvu.edu
- Once the Sharps container is $\frac{3}{4}$ full, it should be closed, sealed with tape, and disposed of.
 - WVU HSC disposal – contact facilities 293-4115
 - Other campuses – check with your department for individual procedures
- Do Not place needles or scalpels in cardboard broken glass boxes.
- Do Not force sharps into a disposal container or retrieve items from inside a sharps container
- Do Not place gauze, gloves, or other non-sharps items in the sharps containers.
- Non-disposable sharps (scissors) must be placed in a hard walled container with a lid for transport to a processing area for decontamination (chemical or autoclave). The container must be labeled as sharps.

Sharps Injuries

- Sharps injuries should be washed with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Contact a medical professional or go directly to the ER or Urgent Care.
- Fill out and EHS injury form <https://www.ehs.wvu.edu/general-safety/injury-illness>
- For sharps injuries involving human materials: Employers are required to provide post-exposure follow-up if an employee sustains a needle puncture and to record the injury on the OSHA 300 log in some cases.

- As per the OSHA standard 1904.8(a):
- The employer must record all work-related needlestick injuries and cuts from sharp objects that are contaminated with another person's blood or other potentially infectious material (as defined by 29 CFR 1910.1030). The employer must enter the case on the OSHA 300 Log as an injury. To protect the employee's privacy, the employer not enter the employee's name on the OSHA 300 Log.

Figure 1. Common Sharps Disposal Containers



References:

- West Virginia Infectious Medical Waste Program: <https://oehs.wvdhhr.org/phs/infectious-medical-waste-disease-control/>
- OSHA Blood Borne Pathogen and Needlestick Prevention: <https://www.osha.gov/bloodborne-pathogens>