

Safe Disposal Options for Used Syringes



What are Sharps?

Sharps is the generic medical term that describes any item that is capable of puncturing the skin such as syringes, hypodermic needles, lancets, etc. Because these sharps potentially have disease carrying blood or bodily fluids on them, they are capable of contaminating/infecting anyone that comes in contact with them.

What are sharps used for?

People use sharps to treat all kinds of medical conditions by using injectable medicines in their home. Sharps users may use lancets, needles, syringes to deliver medicine for a variety of conditions.

Why is it important to dispose of sharps properly?

The general public that come into contact with dirty needles develop a fear factor because it is impossible to know whether needles have been used on a sick animal or a person infected with HIV. There are millions of people in the U.S. infected with Hepatitis B and C, HIV or other contagious disease which can be contracted from a stick with a used hypodermic needle.

Protect Yourself, Protect Others

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has issued new recommendations (Protect Yourself, Protect Others: Safe Options for Home Needle Disposal, website listed below) on disposal of sharps generated at home. These new recommendations discourage users from throwing their sharps directly into the garbage. They encourage the user to dispose of sharps in the following ways:

- **Sharps mail-back programs** – used sharps are placed in special containers which are mailed to a collection site via the U.S. Postal Service. Mail-back programs are available for individual use by sharps users and can also be used at community collection sites. These programs work especially well for rural communities and individuals who wish to protect their privacy. This service usually requires a fee and might not be available in all areas
- **At-home needle destruction devices** – several manufacturers offer a variety of products that allow you to destroy used needles at home. These devices sever, burn or melt the needle and allow the sharps user to discard the syringe or plunger in the garbage. These devices can reduce or eliminate the danger of sharps entering the waste stream. Prices vary according to manufacturer.

- **Household disposal** - Put sharps in a heavy plastic container such as a laundry detergent container with the lid on tight. Some folks even duct tape the screw-on lid to ensure the container is not compromised. Contact your local Solid Waste District for a “sharps disposal container” for minimal cost and in some cases free. Then discard safely with the household solid waste for safe and final disposal.

To Receive Mail-Back Program Information:

Heritage Lifecycle Mail-back: 888-347-7671 or www.store.heritage-enviro.com

Stericycle: 800-355-8773 or www.stericycle.com/consumer-needle-disposal

Sharps Compliance, Inc: www.sharpsinc.com

Safe Needle Disposal: 800-643-1643 or www.safeneedledisposal.org

Veolia: www.veoliaes.com

To Learn More About Sharps – Try these:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/needledisposal

Coalition for Safe Community Needle Disposal: www.safeneedledisposal.org

Earth 911/Household Hazard Waste section: www.earth911.com

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/industrial.medical/med-home.pdf