

SHARPS – HANDLING AND DISPOSING

(For assistance, please contact EHS at (402) 472-4925, or visit our web site at <http://ehs.unl.edu>)

Sharps are items that can easily puncture the skin. Examples include needles, razor blades, and broken glass. All sharps must be handled and disposed in a manner that protects you and others from exposure and possible injury.

General Precautions

- Substitute plastic-ware for glassware whenever possible. Routinely inspect glassware and remove from service items that are damaged, starred, cracked, or chipped. See EHS SOP, **Ground Glass and Glassware Safety** for additional information on avoiding broken glassware.
- Make sure lighting is adequate and the work space is not crowded for the task at hand.
- Be alert at all times when handling sharps. Don't look away or become otherwise distracted while handling a sharp object.
- Select rounded or blunt end devices when practicable.
- Keep sharp tools sharp.
- Use the right tool for the task.
- Use cut-resistant gloves if practicable. In some cases, heavy rubber gloves (i.e., glassware washing) or double gloving (when manual dexterity is important) may be appropriate.
- Use restraining devices when using sharps on animals. When the hands must be placed in a potential danger zone, a mouth guard that has been molded to the crook of the hand may prevent injury.
- Do not handle sharp objects (i.e., broken glass) with bare hands. Use mechanical devices.
- Do not leave unprotected sharps (i.e., razor blades, scalpel tips, etc.) on bench tops or loose in drawers. Use protective shields, cases, Styrofoam blocks, tube holders, etc.
- Protect the sharp when passing from one person to another. If not feasible, use verbal communication when passing.
- On equipment with blades or other sharp surfaces, observe proper lockout/tagout techniques when servicing or performing maintenance.
- Use needle syringes only when absolutely necessary. If a needle syringe is absolutely necessary to the procedure, use a syringe that automatically re-sheathes the needle.
- Do not try to recap the needle of a syringe. An accidental puncture might occur. If absolutely necessary, use the one-handed technique.

- Used needles must not be bent, sheared, broken, recapped, removed from disposable syringes, or otherwise manipulated by hand before disposal.
- Keep a sharps disposal container immediately accessible. Do not allow it to get overfilled. Do not try to retrieve items from sharps disposal containers.
- See EHS SOP, ***On-the-Job Injuries*** for actions to take in response to a sharps injury.

Disposal of Sharps Used with Pathological Agents

- Ensure that appropriate sharps containers are available in the immediate work area:
 - Must be labeled as “Sharps.”
 - Must be labeled with a biohazard symbol.
 - Containers must be rigid, leak and puncture proof, and sealable. A commercially available plastic container that cannot be easily opened after sealing must be used for sharps that are contaminated with potentially infectious human body fluids (bloodborne pathogens).
- Contaminated sharps cannot be placed in the normal trash until effectively decontaminated, usually by steam autoclaving. Use autoclave indicator tape to demonstrate decontamination.
- You may mix non-infectious sharps with potentially infectious sharps only if the entire contents of the container is treated as infectious and it is decontaminated before disposal, as described above.
- Deface the biohazard symbol after treating and prior to disposal. Place the sealed and defaced container in the regular trash.

Disposal of Sharps that Have Not Been Used with Pathological Agents

- Appropriate containers must be available in the immediate work area. Containers must be rigid, leak and puncture proof, sealable, and labeled as “Sharps.”
- Place the sealed container in the regular trash.