Sharps Disposal Fact Sheet

Northeastern University Procedure for the Disposal of Sharps

Fact Sheet #6
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General

The State of Massachusetts regulates "Sharps" as medical or biological waste and defines them as follows: Discarded medical articles that may cause punctures or cuts, including but not limited to, all needles, syringes, lancets, pen needles, Pasteur pipettes, broken medical glassware/plasticware, scalpel blades, suture needles, dental wires, and disposable razors used in connection with a medical procedure.

Segregation and Collection

Sharps that are handled as medical or biological waste shall be segregated from other wastes and aggregated immediately after use in red, fluorescent orange or orange-red leakproof, rigid, puncture-resistant, shatterproof containers that resist breaking under normal conditions of use and handling, and that are marked prominently with the universal biohazard warning symbol and the word "Biohazard" in a contrasting color. These containers are available from the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) or can be purchased by the individual(s) producing the waste. Containers used for collection cannot exceed 20" in height and 16" in width. This restriction is necessary because sharp containers are transferred intact into another box prior to disposal.

Disposal

Containers of sharps will be disposed of at an approved treatment and disposal facility designated by EHS. Designated drop-off locations have been established in many of the autoclave facilities on campus. These locations will also function as a sharps distribution site for users in that building or adjacent buildings. Each location has a designated site coordinator who is responsible for packaging the waste for shipment, managing the site and scheduling waste pickups.

Non-biohazardous Glassware

Broken and unbroken non-medical glassware that is not biohazardous, does not
have to be handled as biohazardous waste. It does, however, represent a physical hazard to those handling or disposing of the material. This type of glassware should be placed in standard glass disposal boxes, which are available through many scientific and safety supply catalogs, or any box lined with a bag and marked prominently on four sides with "CAUTION, BROKEN/UNBROKEN GLASS" may be used.

Radioactive Contamination

Sharps containing radioactive material should be decayed until no longer radioactive (10 half lives) and disposed of as per above, or placed in sharps containers and disposed of through the radioactive waste stream. Sharps handled in this manner should not have any of the other characteristics of medical or biological waste as defined in the Northeastern University Procedure for Disposal of Medical or Biological Waste. If the biological waste characteristics exist, the material should be treated (e.g. chemical, autoclave) before the above waste management practices are implemented. All treatment methods must be approved by EHS, as some could result in volatilization of vapors containing radioactivity. The Biosafety Officer and Radiation Safety Officer at EHS (x2769) should be contacted for specifics on this waste stream.

Hazardous “Chemical” Contamination

Sharps contaminated with only trace amounts of hazardous "chemical" materials and not meeting the definition of hazardous waste as defined in 310 CMR 30.00, may be disposed of through the medical or biological waste stream. Sharps containing significant amounts of hazardous "chemical" materials and meeting the definition of hazardous waste will have to be disposed of as a hazardous "chemical" waste. Sharps handled in this manner should not have any of the other characteristics of medical or biological waste as defined in the Northeastern University Procedure for Disposal of Medical or Biological Waste. If medical or biological waste characteristics exist, then certain waste management practices may be necessary before disposal can be arranged. The Biological Safety Officer and Hazardous Waste Manager at EHS (x2769) should be contacted for specifics on this waste stream.

Questions

If it is not clear in what particular hazard category your waste stream falls into, then the Biological Safety Officer at EHS (x2769) should be contacted for assistance in classifying the waste for disposal.