



Proper Disposal of Household-Generated Sharps

The document provides general information about the proper disposal of sharps.

Sharps are a type of infectious waste in Missouri and as such are regulated as a non-hazardous solid waste under the Missouri Solid Waste Management Law. Due to their potential to transmit disease, it is important that anyone generating sharps be aware of the requirements for their proper disposal.

Specific questions should be addressed to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources using the contact information provided at the end of this document.

Definitions

In Missouri, “sharps” are defined as hypodermic needles, syringes, lancets and other sharp items that have the potential for transmitting an infectious disease. Although households that generate sharps are exempt from most disposal requirements, those households are still required to properly package the sharps to prevent accidental sticks or punctures by those handling the waste.

A household generator is any single-family residential premise or a single-family dwelling unit where the wastes or sharps are generated on-site. Households typically generate small numbers of sharps. Other small quantities of sharps generated by businesses (those businesses that produce less than 220 pounds of sharps per month), such as tattoo parlors, veterinary offices or dental offices are required to meet more stringent requirements for disposal. These requirements are described in the department’s technical bulletin *Management of Infectious Waste by Small Quantity Generators* (PUB188).

Properly managing and disposing of household generated sharps safely reduces pollution to the environment and prevents injury and disease transmission from needle-sticks.

Packaging, Storage and Disposal of Sharps

The department recommends households safely dispose of sharps by following these steps:

- After use, place sharps or blades back into their protective case, sleeve or packaging. If the sharps or blades have not been used, keep in protective packaging.
- Prior to placing in the trash, the sharps must be packaged in puncture-resistant containers. Place the sharps in a rigid plastic bottle with a tight-fitting cap, such as an empty laundry detergent or fabric softener bottle (not a soda bottle or milk carton, which is thinner-walled plastic).
- Although it is legal to dispose of household-generated sharps along with your other trash, the department recommends you contact your waste hauler to advise them of how you plan to package the sharps. This allows you to determine if your waste hauler accepts sharps prior to them being placed in with your other household waste. Waste hauling companies reserve the right to accept or deny waste they transport for disposal. Your prior notification will preserve a good relationship with your hauler and keep their personnel safe from any inadvertent sticks when their truck’s compactor unit crushes the container holding the sharps.

- After you have worked any details out with your waste hauler, place the sharps container in with your other household waste for disposal.

Note: Missouri residents may dispose of household-generated sharps along with their regular trash. However, some municipalities prohibit this method of disposal. Please check with your local district, county, or municipal authority to determine if this practice is in compliance with their requirements.

In addition, please consider these safety reminders when disposing of sharps:

- Never place containers with sharps in a recycling bin.
- Never place loose sharps in the trash.

Alternate Methods for Disposal of Sharps

You may wish to check with local medical facilities, doctors' offices, or pharmacies to determine whether they offer any return programs for sharps purchased through their business.

If they provide this service, coordinate disposal with them. Their service may include providing a sharps container when you purchase syringes. If so, learn about and coordinate disposal of your sharps with them.

Mail-back sharps disposal programs are available in some locations. They allow residential sharps generators to mail sharps to licensed disposal facilities. These programs charge a fee for their service, and due to federal regulations there are restrictions and requirements you must meet to use this service. Check with your local health care provider, a pharmacist, or search the yellow pages or Internet (search for "sharps mail-back programs") to see if this option is available in your area.

Needle destruction devices are containers with mechanisms that bend, break, incinerate (destroy by high heat), or shear needles. In Missouri, if you wish to dispose of your sharps without having to package them in a rigid container, you must use one of these or another device to remove the pointed ends of the sharps that cause a stick hazard. All sharps must be broken, sheared, or incinerated to the extent that they are no longer able to puncture the skin of any person handling them after you've used the device. Once your sharps have been either melted down or sheared off, the remaining syringes and melted metal can be safely disposed of along with your other household waste.

For More Information

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