

Household Sharps Disposal

In Kentucky, the laws and regulations referencing medical waste (including sharps) are primarily made for healthcare facilities. Although hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and laboratories are the primary generators of this type of waste, an increase in the use of sharps outside of healthcare facilities has become a matter of public concern.

Since there are currently no laws that regulate home-generated sharps (needles, syringes and lancets), these items can legally be discarded with everyday household trash and ultimately disposed of in a permitted contained landfill. Because these items end up in the municipal solid waste stream, the public (especially sanitation workers) may be exposed to needle-stick injuries and possibly bloodborne infections. In order to minimize these risks, the Environmental Compliance Assistance Program offers the following recommendations for safe disposal of sharps.

✓ Sharps Disposal **DOs**

- **DO** immediately place used needles and other sharps in a sharps disposal container to reduce the risk of needle sticks, cuts or punctures.
- **DO** use an FDA-cleared sharps disposal container, if possible. If using a household container, use a heavy-duty plastic or metal household container with a screw-on lid.
 - A good example of a household container is a laundry detergent bottle.
 - If using a plastic container, look for the #2 HDPE symbol to make sure the plastic is strong enough not to be pierced by the sharps.
 - Clearly label household sharps containers with “DO NOT RECYCLE” and “SHARPS”.
 - When disposing of the container, screw the cap on tightly and cover the top and cap with a strong tape, like duct tape.
 - Dispose with household trash. Make sure the garbage container has a lid to prevent tampering.
- **DO** be careful not to overfill your sharps container. A good rule of thumb is to fill the container two-thirds of the way and prepare it for disposal.
- **DO** contact your local waste hauler for recommendations specific to your area.



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✗ Sharps Disposal **DON'Ts**

- **DON'T** throw loose needles or other sharps into the trash.
- **DON'T** flush needles and sharps down the toilet.
- **DON'T** put needles and sharps into your recycling bin.



Recommended Disposal Options

While it is legal to dispose of sharps with other household solid waste, there are options with fewer potential hazards. Used sharps can injure people and spread diseases if not properly handled and disposed. The importance of using proper disposal techniques is to provide safe disposal of sharps in the home and to protect collectors when they are picked up.

Below are six different potential disposal options; however, not all of these options are available across the Commonwealth. It is recommended to call your solid waste hauler, municipal government (ask for the person who oversees solid waste disposal), or local health department to determine which of these options are available in your area.

1. Drop-off Collection Sites

Sharps users may be able to take their filled container to appropriate collection sites, which may include doctors' offices, hospitals, health clinics, pharmacies, health departments, community organizations, police departments, and fire stations. These programs often give self-injectors the option of using empty household containers to collect sharps.

2. Syringe Exchange Programs

Lexington, Louisville, and other communities now host used needle exchanges. These programs generally focus on obtaining needles from injecting drug users, but some also accept household sharps containers for proper disposal. A list of locations with syringe exchange programs is available online from the [Kentucky Harm Reduction Coalition](#) or call (502) 581-9728; it is also available online from the [Cabinet for Health and Family Services](#) or call (502) 564-6539.

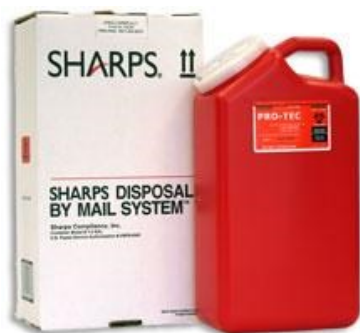
3. Household Hazardous Waste Collections

Many communities in Kentucky host annual or semiannual household hazardous waste collection events where materials, such as paints and used oil, are accepted and disposed of properly. Some of these events may accept used sharps in special sharps containers or in approved household containers.



4. Mail-back Programs

When using mail-back programs, sharps users purchase an approved disposal container that comes with mail-back packaging. Once full, the container is mailed, in accordance with U.S. Postal Service requirements, to a collection site for proper disposal at no additional cost.



5. Residential Special Waste Pickup Services

Some hazardous and special waste hauling services perform residential collection. Sharps users can place their used sharps in a special container and set it outside their home for collection by trained special waste handlers. Some services require customers to call for pickup, while others offer regular schedules.



6. Home Needle Destruction Devices

A variety of products are available that clip, melt or burn the needle of a syringe so it can be safely thrown away with regular household garbage. These devices reduce or eliminate the danger of sharps entering the waste stream.



Where to Get More Information

- Call your local solid waste hauler, [Solid Waste Coordinator](#), or local health department to find out about programs in your area.
- Consult the [Medical Waste information](#) webpage by the Division of Waste Management or contact them via email at waste@ky.gov or call (502) 564-6716.
- Contact the Environmental Compliance Assistance Program for information regarding Kentucky's environmental regulations at (502)782-6189 or email envhelp@ky.gov.
- Check SafeNeedleDisposal.org or call 800-643-1643 to find out about needle disposal programs near you and mail-back programs.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has more information about sharps disposal on its [website](#).
- To learn more about rules regarding medical waste disposal, consult the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website at www.epa.com/rcra/medical-waste.
- Contact the North American Syringe Exchange Network at (253)272-4857 or visit the website at nasen.org.



The information in this document is offered only as general guidance. It is not a substitute for reading and understanding Kentucky's statutes and regulations governing the applicability and issuance of environmental permits. Specific requirements may vary with location. ECAP is not authorized to relieve any person from any requirement of federal regulations or Kentucky law through this document.