Pointers for Using Biohazardous Sharps Containers Safely and Effectively

1. Select a container manufactured for sharps collection that is the appropriate size and configuration for the biohazardous sharps used in your lab. Choose lids that will allow for restriction of the opening when not in use (i.e., “passive closure” or “sliding window” design). NOTE: Do not select containers over 18 gallons in capacity if your lab is in a University building (MRB III/LL, Stevenson Center, ESB, Olin, FEL, Featheringill).

2. Before assembling a sharps container, verify that all components are free of damage and functioning properly. When assembling sharps containers, make sure that the lid fastens and “clicks” on all contact points on the container body.

3. Place the assembled sharps container on its bottom on a stable surface before use. Select a location that will allow you to dispose of the sharps without having to walk to the container or reach awkwardly to get to it.

4. Do NOT store items on top of the container or store it on a surface where it could be easily knocked over.

5. When a sharps container is not in use or when it is being moved, restrict the opening. When moving or picking up the container, grasp it by the container body and not the lid.

6. Do NOT deposit non-sharps items (like gloves, wrappers, batteries, etc.) or items containing free liquids in a biohazardous sharps container. These can obstruct the opening and prevent sharps from freely falling into the container.

7. Do NOT force an item into a sharps container or shake a sharps container to make more room in it.

8. When a sharps container is ¾ full (or items no longer freely fall in, whichever comes first), permanently close it (listen for the “click”) and replace it with a new container. Remove any visible contamination from the outside of the closed container before submitting for disposal. NOTE: If you do not hear a “click” or cannot verify that the lid is permanently closed, use packing or duct tape to secure the lid.

9. If a sharps container is found to be overfilled (i.e., items protruding out of the opening), report this to your supervisor. Use hand tools (forceps, tweezers, pliers, etc.) to remove items. Do not retrieve items by hand.

10. If you discover stray sharps, bring the sharps container to the sharp so that it can be dropped directly into the container. Only retrieve the sharp if forceps are available and can be safely used, or if a non-sharp surface is available to grasp.

11. If you discover a sharps container that is no longer suitable for use (i.e., the lid is missing or cracked, the plastic is brittle or faded), take the container out of service and mark it as “do not use”. Do NOT submit the container for disposal through SOM Environmental Services or Biowaste LLC. Instead, contact VU Biosafety (VUBiosafety@vanderbilt.edu) for assistance with disposal.

CONTAINER SELECTION

VU EHS Biosafety has partnered with the Vanderbilt Chemical Storeroom to offer a range of containers that should cover most needs. NOTE: The black containers are for devices used exclusively with hazardous chemicals.

CONTAINER DISPOSAL

Labs in VU buildings: Place permanently closed container upright in a lined RMW shipping container. No containers over 18-gallon capacity.

Labs in VUMC buildings: Place permanently closed containers in a secondary container labeled as “biohazard sharps for pickup” next to the lab’s trash can (as shown to left).

Questions about biohazardous sharps or sharps containers? Contact us at VUBiosafety@vanderbilt.edu

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https://www.vanderbilt.edu/healthwellness/ehs/