SAFETY QUICK FACTS

SHARPS PRECAUTIONS

Items are generally considered “sharps” if the item was designed to cut or puncture skin or if the item has the potential to penetrate skin when not properly handled. Non-contaminated sharps can pose puncture and laceration hazards. Sharps contaminated with chemical, biological, and radioactive hazards pose additional exposure and disposal concerns. General guidance for the safe handling of sharps is provided here.

Injury response

- For **major injuries** (item lodged in skin or eye, profuse bleeding, etc.) dial 911 and seek immediate care from Authorized Medical Providers.
- For **minor injuries with potentially contaminated sharps**, see “Non-clean” Sharp Objects Injuries including Needlesticks.
- For **other minor injuries** notify your supervisor immediately and follow the Accident Report Form Flow Chart.

Sharps precautions

- Identify and reduce sharps in the workplace. Determine whether or not an alternative is available. One example is replacing the use of a glass item with plastic.
- Consider safer sharps devices for items that are designed to cut or puncture skin such as needles and scalpels. The University of Virginia International Health Care Worker Safety Center has an extensive listing of safety devices and manufacturers.
- Be properly trained by senior personnel on new techniques and equipment in a controlled setting before employing these in a procedure involving chemical, biological, radioactive hazards. Also, refer to the Biosafety Manual and the Radiation Safety Manual for further guidance on safe handling of contaminated sharps.
- Do not leave sharp devices out any longer than necessary. For reusable sharps devices (i.e., knives, scissors), have a storage container that will enclose the sharp end (i.e., a bucket or enclosed tray) readily available at the point of use. Confirming that sharps are not present will ensure that no injuries occur.
- Never recap, bend, shear, break, or remove a needle from a disposable syringe, or otherwise manipulate a needle by hand before disposal. This avoids the generation of aerosols and also eliminates unnecessary handling that could cause sharps injury.
- Do not handle broken glassware directly. Instead, use a brush and dustpan, tongs, or forceps to remove broken glassware. Substitute plasticware for glassware whenever possible.
- Transport non-disposable sharps in a hard walled container to a processing area for decontamination.
- **Safely dispose of sharps:**
  - For disposable sharps, have a puncture-resistant container designed for sharps disposal readily available, preferably within arm's reach for disposal of sharps immediately after use if your procedures permit you to do so.
  - Non-contaminated sharps may be disposed of in broken glass waste boxes lined with a plastic bag (including empty glass chemical bottles since they may break during transportation).
  - For further information about sharps potentially contaminated:
    - with human blood or other potentially infectious material, refer to the EHS website for biohazard waste.
    - with radioactive materials, refer to the EHS website for the Radiation Safety Manual.
    - with chemicals, refer to the EHS website for hazardous waste removal.