

Comingling Sharps Waste and Non-Hazardous Pharmaceutical Waste Could Help Alleviate Nursing Burdens

Single-container solutions can help save time and simplify waste disposal.

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We protect what matters.



Nurses provide attentive patient care, quality clinical services, accurate documentation, and quick decision-making in fast-paced healthcare settings. As part of their daily responsibilities and to maintain patient and staff safety, they must ensure the safe and compliant disposal of sharps and pharmaceutical waste. When stress is high and multiple patients depend on nurses, hospitals should review and implement solutions that help make it easier and more efficient for nurses to do their jobs.

In 2022, Stericycle sponsored an independently administered nationwide blind survey of 125 randomly selected nurses in hospitals in the United States in order to dig deeper into the challenges nurses face and the role that medical waste management partners can play in mitigating those challenges.

Of the 125 survey participants:

90.4% REGISTERED NURSES (RNs),
9.6% holding ADVANCED PRACTICE QUALIFICATIONS

All worked in an
ACUTE-CARE
HOSPITAL SETTING

87.2% WORKED IN FACILITIES that had SEPARATE CONTAINERS for SHARPS
and NON-HAZARDOUS PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE
(vs. single container for both sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste)

The following survey findings illustrate how a single container for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste disposal could benefit hospital staff by simplifying the disposal process and ultimately enable nurses to spend more time on patient care.

Highlights:

- Nurses dispose of sharps and pharmaceutical wastes regularly, but the process can be cumbersome
- Combining sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste disposal in one container can save time and minimize confusion
- Nurses' time savings could transfer to patient care
- Nurses are open to process changes that lead to efficiencies



Nurses dispose of sharps and pharmaceutical wastes regularly, but the process can be cumbersome.

Nurses are integral to the sharps and pharmaceutical waste disposal process. They dispose of sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste regularly during the day. Proper disposal is key to ensuring that sharps and pharmaceutical waste do not end up in the wrong hands.

- 99% of the nurses surveyed said that they dispose of sharps waste four or more times per day, with 87% disposing of sharps waste 10 or more times per day.
- 89% of the nurses surveyed said that they dispose of non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste four or more times per day, with 46% disposing of this waste stream 10 or more times a day.

89% of nurses surveyed said that they dispose of non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste **FOUR OR MORE TIMES PER DAY**

Of the nurses surveyed, **87%** indicated that their place of work **HAS SEPARATE CONTAINERS FOR SHARPS AND NON-HAZARDOUS PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE**, which often requires nurses to leave the patient room to dispose of waste. This can be **TIME CONSUMING**.

Nurses reported having to take the syringes or bags out of the room to dispose of them and search for the drug disposal station.

Combining sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste disposal in one container can save time and help minimize confusion.

Nurses and management-level staff may be more accustomed to separate containers for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste; “It’s all I’ve ever used,” and “I’m just in the habit of doing this” as some survey respondents stated. High traffic departments and nurses in training may save time and make training easier by combining sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste into one container.

Innovative options are available that can significantly improve efficiencies of daily operations at the point of care. Through the seamless integration of a single-container solution for the disposal of both sharps waste and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste, Stericycle’s SharpsRx Pro™ waste management services can help health systems save nurses time and in turn improve the overall quality of care.

- 34% of nurses surveyed said they prefer using the single-container approach, while only 13% of nurses said their organization uses single-stream containers for both sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceuticals.
- 75% of respondents who had two containers (one for sharps and one for non-hazardous pharmaceutical wastes) indicated that the ability to dispose of both waste streams at the point of patient care would improve how they perform their work.

34%
of nurses
surveyed **PREFERRED**
using a single container
while only 13%
actually have it

When asked why they preferred a single container solution, time savings and easier training were common themes. One respondent indicated:

“When you are in a rush, it is easier to put everything into one container. It’s also easier to train new staff.”

– Nurse in Idaho

75%

of respondents indicated that the ability to dispose of both waste streams at the point of patient care would **IMPROVE HOW THEY PERFORM THEIR WORK.**



Nurses' time savings can transfer to patient care.

Nurses believe implementing a single-container solution for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste management could streamline waste disposal processes, save time, improve compliance and operational efficiencies, and allow them to focus on patient care. Sixty-five percent of the nurses surveyed indicated that they would use any time saved through use of a single-container solution for patient care.

Of respondents who have separate containers for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste:

78% said **COMINGLE CONTAINERS** would be **SIMPLER TO USE** than separate containers.

75% said **WASTE DISPOSAL AT THE POINT OF PATIENT CARE** would **HELP IMPROVE** how they **PERFORM THEIR WORK**.

78% said **WASTE DISPOSAL AT THE POINT OF PATIENT CARE** would **HELP** with **PATIENT** and **NURSE SAFETY**.

75% said **COMINGLE CONTAINERS** would **HELP IMPROVE** the use of **SPACE** at their organization.

Where would nurses use the time saved by using one container for waste disposal?

65%
PATIENT CARE

23%
CHARTING OR DOCUMENTATION

Where comingle containers could be used (top three responses):

76%
INTENSIVE CARE UNITS

72%
EMERGENCY ROOMS

65%
PATIENT ROOMS



Nurses are open to process changes that can lead to efficiencies.

Process changes do not deter nurses. Sixty-nine percent of the nurses surveyed said that adjusting to a new comingle sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste container would be “very easy” or “somewhat easy.” Only 5% said that it would be “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult” to adjust to a comingle container.

Hospital teams want the best options that simplify disposal methods and minimize confusion about properly identifying and disposing of sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste.

Respondents who have separate containers for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste believe comingling sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste in one container would:

88%
SIMPLIFY TRAINING
FOR USERS

86%
LEAD TO FEWER
QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW
TO DISPOSE OF WASTE

85%
SIMPLIFY DISPOSAL
PROCESSES

Save an average of
21 minutes
DURING A 10-HOUR SHIFT
(74% of responses were in the
range of 5 to 30 minutes per shift)

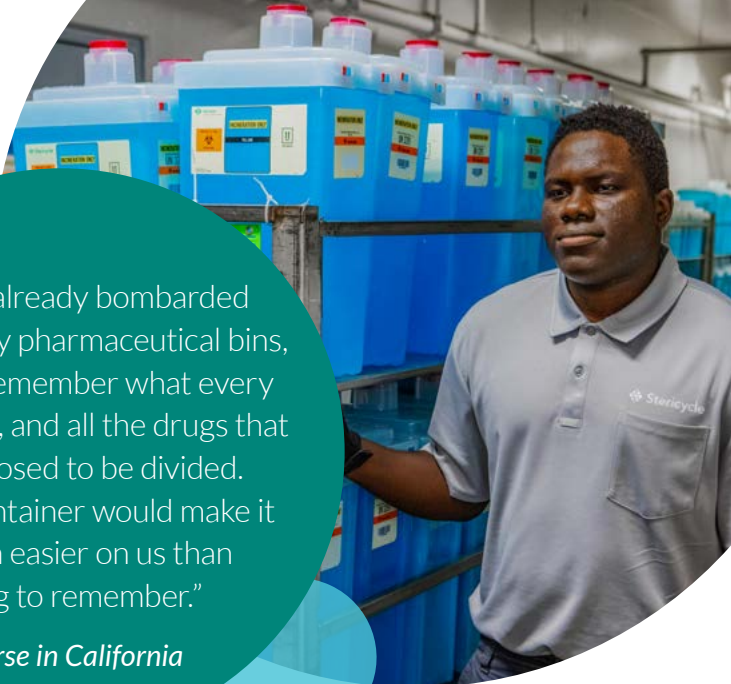
According to the survey, 74% of respondents believe that access to instructional materials is crucial for safe waste disposal. A regulated medical waste management partner can add value by providing extensive staff training, education, and ongoing support. Nurses identified the following as the most helpful education and training methods for learning about different or new comingle sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste containers:

66% INSTRUCTIONS

62% IN-PERSON
TRAINING

58% POSTERS

50% VIRTUAL
TRAINING



“We are already bombarded with so many pharmaceutical bins, having to remember what every color means, and all the drugs that are supposed to be divided. A single container would make it so much easier on us than having to remember.”

- Nurse in California

Stericycle SharpsRx Pro™ is a single container solution for sharps and non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste to help simplify the waste disposal process.* Stericycle also offers training and educational materials about the program, and delivers consistent service. These benefits can help your staff save time and allow them to focus on patient care and other priorities.

We protect what matters.™

Visit [SharpsRx Pro](#) or call [866-783-6275](tel:866-783-6275) to learn more about Stericycle’s sharps and Rx disposal solutions and how Stericycle can help you protect what matters.

*Availability dependent on customer location.

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