



## **Supporting Safe Sharps Disposal in Non-healthcare Settings**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to non-healthcare organizations interested in implementing sharps disposal training for staff and/or public sharps disposal units. Additional sharps disposal resources and training are available from Grey Bruce Public Health (GBPH).

### **What is a sharp?**

A sharp is any item having corners, edges or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin. Examples include needles, syringes, lancets and auto-injectors. Drug equipment such as cookers, filters, pipes and alcohol swabs should also be treated as sharps.

### **Reasons for using needles/sharps**

People use sharps for different reasons. Many medical conditions involve the use of needles, such as diabetes. People with conditions like cancer and arthritis also use needles for medication to manage pain. Some people use needles to inject drugs.

### **What are the risks of handling used sharps?**

When a person finishes using a sharp, some of that person's blood may still be inside the needle or the syringe. If a person gets poked by another person's used needle and the blood goes into their bloodstream, they could get sick with infections like HIV or Hepatitis C. Most people will not get sick by picking up or getting poked by a used needle, but it is important to be cautious. Drug equipment may also contain traces of bodily fluids and unknown substances and should also be treated as sharps and disposed of according to best practice recommendations.

### **Discarded sharps in public places is an issue in many communities.**

When sharps are discarded improperly in a community, it is often a result of not having a place to properly dispose of them. Most people will dispose of sharps appropriately if safe choices are available.

### **Who can accidentally get poked by a sharp?**

While anyone can get hurt by discarded sharps in communities, maintenance and custodial workers, who handle garbage and recycling, are at higher risk.



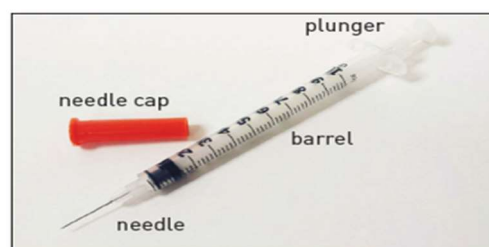
## A community approach is required to address this issue.

Everyone who uses sharps requires safe disposal options. With safe disposal, no one gets hurt accidentally. Recommendations for a community approach to sharps disposal are listed below.

- 1** Public sharps disposal units can decrease the number of found sharps in the community. It also demonstrates an inclusive approach to support all persons who use sharps.
- 2** **Those who may encounter discarded sharps through their work should have the knowledge and tools to be able to safely manage these situations.**

### What does a needle look like?

Needles used at home or by persons who inject drugs look the same as needles used in a healthcare provider's office. Needles are also called syringes or sharps.



### What are these small spoons?

These are called cookers and are used for mixing and heating drugs prior to injection.



### What are these plastic vials?

Sterile water can be used to prepare injection drugs and come in small plastic vials.



### What is a tourniquet?

It is a strip of rubber used to compress an arm for the veins to bulge out to make injecting easier.



### What are these pipes?

Glass pipes are used for smoking drugs such as crystal meth and crack cocaine.





## What is a sharps container?

A sharps or biohazard container is made of hard plastic, can be sealed, comes in different sizes and can hold many needles. You can buy a sharps container at many pharmacies.



## What are public sharps disposal units?

Units are labelled with the biohazard symbol and located in public spaces such as outdoors or mounted to walls in washrooms in public buildings. Units are maintained by organizations and biohazardous waste disposal companies.



## Recommendations for Implementing Public Sharps Disposal Units & Training

- Track the location and number of found sharps to identify if this is an issue in your community, the need for staff training and possible sites or facilities for sharps unit installation. Tracking this data before the unit is installed will also allow for evaluation of the initiative.
- Meet with involved staff, such as custodial, maintenance or the works department, early in the planning phase to raise awareness of the issue and to provide education on this topic. Work with staff to develop relevant processes to manage and address this concern. Sharps disposal training and resources are available from GBPH (see Appendix C).
- Develop policies and guidelines that address the following:
  - Safe disposal of sharps and staff educational requirements (see Appendix A)
  - What to do in the event of a needle stick injury (see Appendix B)
  - Process for sharps disposal unit maintenance if applicable including how often is it checked, who is responsible for monitoring the unit and responding to calls from the public if issues arise, and the number for the public to call if there is an issue. Biohazardous waste disposal companies can also be contracted to monitor and maintain units.





- Contact medical waste companies to source options for secure sharps disposal containers or work with the organization to understand current biohazardous waste disposal procedures and investigate if this cost can be shared with existing facilities.
- Train the staff who will be responsible for sharps unit maintenance/sharps disposal, if applicable. Training should cover sharps unit use, safe handling and disposal of sharps, policy review, equipment required, etc. Safe sharps disposal training and resources are available from GBPH (see Appendix C). See Appendices A and B for example policies and procedures.
- Ensure staff authorized to complete sharps disposal have the required equipment including closed toe shoes, sharps/biohazardous waste containers, tongs, and gloves (consider puncture resistant gloves, such as Turtleskin). Staff may also require a lockable tote for transporting sharps and a method of disinfecting tongs after use (bleach and water, oxivir wipes), if applicable.
- Consider developing media releases/social media to increase public education (see Appendix D).

## Post-Implementation

Consider completing a media release to let the public know about the installation of the public sharps disposal unit and include the number and hours of the staff to contact should there be an issue with the unit. Address issues as they arise and keep this as a standing item during meetings with involved staff. Evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative; examples of possible evaluation indicators are needles found prior to installation of the unit versus post installation, how often staff are emptying the unit, average number of needles collected, and staff confidence level in maintaining the unit or disposing of sharps/need for continued professional development.

## Disposing of Found Sharps

### Sharps found on public property

If sharps are found on public property, community members can check with their local municipality and/or police service.

If sharps are found on City of Owen Sound property, community members can call:

- Public Works at 519-376-4274 between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.
- Owen Sound Police Services at 519-376-1234 x 0 if between the hours of 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 a.m.



## Sharps found on private property

Home and property owners are responsible for picking up and disposing of used needles/sharps found on their properties. Safe sharps disposal kits, which contain the equipment and instructions to safely dispose of a small number of sharps, are available for free from Grey Bruce Public Health, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For larger clean-ups, the following companies are available for hire:

- ServiceMaster Restore of Grey Bruce: [svmrestore-greybruce.ca](http://svmrestore-greybruce.ca) or 519-372-2206
- PuroClean: [puroclean.ca](http://puroclean.ca) or 705-293-0172
- Gods Cleaning Crew: [godsclimbingcrew.ca](http://godsclimbingcrew.ca) or 1-888-679-9116

## Once collected, sharps can be disposed of using one of these services:

### Public Sharps Disposal Units

- A list of outdoor biohazard disposal units can be found at: <https://ohrdp.ca/find-supplies/>
- In Owen Sound, public outdoor sharps disposal units are located at Carney's Lane on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave East (behind Rexall Pharma Plus) and behind the Fresh Roots Café at 1028 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave East.

### Local Pharmacies

Some pharmacies are part of the "Take it Back" Ontario Sharps Collection program and will accept needles from the public at no charge during regular business hours. Participating pharmacies only accept sharps in an approved hard-shell container, which is labelled with the universal or cytotoxic biohazard symbol. For a list of participating pharmacies, visit: <https://healthsteward.ca/find-a-collection-location/>

### Grey Bruce Public Health

101 17<sup>th</sup> St East, Owen Sound, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The GBPH Needle Syringe Program will accept sharps in biohazard disposal containers and other hard, puncture-resistant containers such as laundry detergent bottles or pop bottles.



## Appendix A: Example Safe Sharps Disposal Policy and Procedure

**Policy:** To ensure staff safely dispose of sharps and/or drug equipment found in the community to keep staff and community members safe. Sharps may contain blood, body fluids or hazardous substances and must be treated as a health hazard and disposed of according to best practice recommendations.

**Application:** This policy applies to staff authorized to dispose of sharps found in the community.

**Definitions:** A sharp is any item having corners, edges or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin. Examples include needles with attached syringes, lancets and auto-injectors. Drug equipment such as cookers, filters, pipes and alcohol swabs should also be treated as health hazards.

**Background:** Discarded sharps in public places is an issue in many communities. People use sharps for different reasons. Many medical conditions involve the use of needles, such as diabetes. People with conditions like cancer and arthritis use needles for medication to manage pain. Some people use needles to inject drugs. When sharps are discarded in a community, it is often a result of not having a place to properly dispose of them. Most people will dispose of sharps appropriately if safe choices are made available. When a person finishes using a sharp, some of that person's blood may still be inside the needle or the syringe. If a person gets poked by another person's used needle and the blood goes into their bloodstream, they could get sick with infections like Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C. Most people will not get sick by picking up or getting poked by a used needle, but it is important to be cautious. Those who may encounter discarded sharps in the community through their work should have the knowledge and tools to be able to safely manage these situations.

**Policy Requirements:** The organization must ensure that all staff responsible for sharps disposal receive safe sharps disposal training and equipment prior to taking on this role.

**Consequences and Monitoring:** Failure to implement this policy could result in staff injury and/or illness. The implementation of this policy will be monitored by management/supervisors.

### Procedure for Assessing the Site of Found Sharps for Health Hazards:

1. Before proceeding with safe sharps disposal, assess the site of the found sharp/drug equipment for potential hazards. Examples of possible hazards include:
  - a. Additional sharps/drug equipment
  - b. Environmental hazards such as ice, water or fire hazards
  - c. Presence of an unknown substance
2. If safe to proceed, follow the Procedure for the Safe Disposal of Found Sharps below. If unsafe to proceed, contact supervisor for direction.



### Procedure for the Safe Disposal of Found Sharps:

1. Obtain the Sharps Disposal Bin. This bin contains all equipment required to safely dispose of sharps including instructions, gloves, tongs and a regulated sharps container. Include picture of organizational Sharps Disposal Bin below.
2. Put on gloves to protect yourself. Do not handle sharps with hands. Gloves, tongs and closed toe shoes are required.
3. At the site of the found sharp/drug equipment, place the sharps container on a flat surface. In the case of a found needle, pick up the needle with tongs on the middle of the barrel of the needle with the sharp end facing down. Do not attempt to recap or break needle tips off. If multiple sharps are present, pick up one at a time.
4. Place the sharp in the sharps container sharp end first and shut the lid. If the sharps container is full, ensure lid is fully latched in the locked position. If using tongs to dispose of sharps on one occasion, dispose of tongs in the garbage. If using tongs to dispose of sharps on more than one occasion, clean and disinfect the tongs prior to placing back in the bin. *The GBPH safe sharps disposal video and safe sharps disposal kits include instructions for disinfecting tongs after use (see Appendix C).*
5. Place the sharps container in the Sharps Disposal Bin. If transporting the bin, place in the rear of the vehicle.
6. Dispose of gloves and wash hands with soap and warm water (preferred) or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
7. Store the sharps container in a secure area. If the sharps container is full, put on gloves and prepare for biohazardous waste disposal as per organizational policy.
8. Notify supervisor of the location, a description of the found sharps/drug equipment and the action taken by the staff member.

Supporting Documents: [Link to GBPH safe sharps disposal videos, resources, and other related policies and procedures.](#)

### References

Public Health Sudbury and Districts. (2020). *Safe needle disposal. What you need to know.* Retrieved from [https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Safe\\_Needle\\_Disposal\\_Toolkit\\_2020\\_EN.pdf](https://www.phsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Safe_Needle_Disposal_Toolkit_2020_EN.pdf)

Toronto Public Health. (2018). *Needle Disposal: Guidance for Policies and Procedures.* Retrieved from <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/8dbc-Needle-Disposal-Guidance.pdf>



## Appendix B: Example Needle Stick Injury Policy and Procedure

**Purpose:** To facilitate prompt and efficient follow-up for the protection of staff, students and volunteers who have been exposed to a needle stick injury and/or exposure to blood or body fluids.

**Policy:** All staff, students and volunteers are required to follow the documented procedure in the event of a needle stick injury and/or exposure to blood or body fluids.

### Procedure

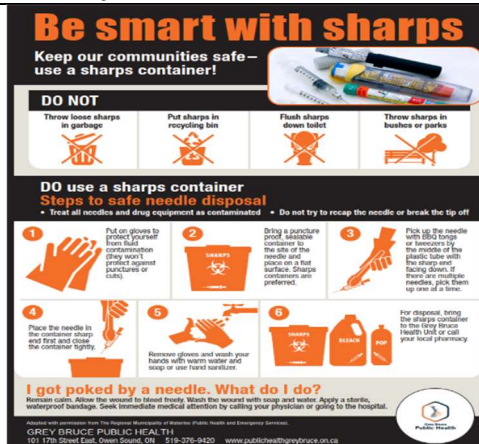

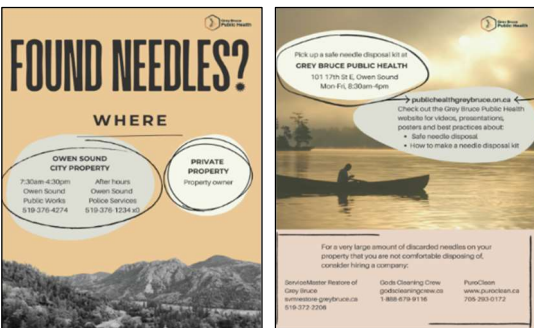
- 1.0 Upon injury and/or exposure to blood or bodily fluids from a known or unknown source staff, students or volunteers (hereinafter referred to as the “injured person”) shall follow the procedures to minimize/eliminate the risk of infection or injury:
  - 1.1 Encourage a needle stick injury to bleed freely; gently milk the wound to push blood from the wound out of the body and then cleanse the area thoroughly with soap and water.
  - 1.2 Following exposure of eyes or mucosal membranes to blood and/or bodily fluids, irrigate affected areas immediately with water.
  - 1.3 Apply a sterile, waterproof bandage.
  - 1.4 Report the injury and/or hazardous situation immediately to a manager or director.
  - 1.5 Proceed immediately to a primary health care provider or emergency department for assessment of injury and required blood testing.
  - 1.6 Follow immunization and/or prophylaxis recommendations of health care provider (HCP) or emergency department after assessment of the potential risk from the incident.
  - 1.7 Complete required organizational forms (e.g. Injury/Hazardous Situation Report, Serious Occurrence Reporting and Follow-Up Form, etc.) and forward to manager/Human Resources as soon as possible following the incident and/or within organizational time requirements.
  - 1.8 Follow up with primary HCP or emergency department for further testing and treatment as appropriate.
  - 1.9 If you require further assistance, call the Infectious Diseases Program at the Grey Bruce Public Health (GBPH) at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.
- 2.0 Upon injury and/or exposure to blood or bodily fluids from a known or unknown source, managers and directors shall follow the procedures below to minimize/eliminate the risk of infection or injury to the injured person:
  - 2.1 Ensure injured person has completed first aid steps as outlined in 1.1 to 1.4.
  - 2.2 Advise injured person to seek medical attention (HCP or emergency department) as soon as possible. Assist with transportation needs for medical attention, as required (e.g. taxi, ambulance).
  - 2.3 Assist injured person to complete required organizational forms/reports.
  - 2.4 Receive required organizational forms from the injured person. Complete the manager’s section and forward to director/Human Resources as per organizational procedure.
  - 2.5 Follow up with recommendations from the HCP and/or the GBPH Infectious Diseases Program following the occurrence as required.








## Appendix C: Grey Bruce Public Health Safe Sharps Disposal Resources

The following videos and resources are available on the [Grey Bruce Public Health](https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca) website. For questions or training support, contact [harmreduction@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca](mailto:harmreduction@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca)

RESOURCE	CONTENT	LINKS/IMAGES
Video	Safe sharps disposal steps	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo</a>
Video	How to make sharps disposal kits	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg</a>
Poster	Safe sharps disposal steps, what to do in the event of needle stick injury, and where to return used sharps. Click the image to access the poster.	 A poster titled "Be smart with sharps" with the subtitle "Keep our communities safe—use a sharps container!". It lists "DO NOT" actions: throwing loose sharps in garbage, recycling bins, down the toilet, or in bushes/parks. It then lists "DO use a sharps container" with steps: 1. Put on gloves, 2. Bring a puncture-proof sharps container, 3. Pick up the needle, 4. Place the needle in the container, 5. Remove gloves and wash hands, 6. For disposal, bring the container to a pharmacy or clinic. It also includes a section "I got poked by a needle. What do I do?" with instructions to wash the wound and seek medical attention if needed.
Kit	Safe sharps disposal kits contain equipment and instructions to safely dispose of a small number of sharps. Kits are available for free from GBPH Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	 A photograph of a sharps disposal kit. It includes a yellow sharps container with a red lid, a box of gloves, a box of band-aids, and a sharps disposal kit box with instructions.
Poster (front and back shown)	What to do with found sharps on City of Owen Sound property, as private property owners, where to get safe needle disposal kits, and safe sharps disposal clean-up companies for hire.	 A poster titled "FOUND NEEDLES?" with the subtitle "WHERE". It provides information on where to drop off sharps: Owen Sound City Property (7:30am-4:30pm, 519-376-4274) and Private Property (After hours, 519-376-1234 x0). It also includes contact information for SharpsMaster Services, Sharps Cleaning Crew, and PharmClean.
Training PPT	Organizations may use this PPT to train staff on safe sharps disposal. GBPH also provides this training.	<a href="https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Harm%20Reduction/Safe%20Handling%20and%20Disposal%20of%20Sharps.pptx">https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Harm%20Reduction/Safe%20Handling%20and%20Disposal%20of%20Sharps.pptx</a>



## Appendix D: Example Safe Sharps Disposal Social Media Posts

CONTENT	IMAGES	LINKS
A sharp is an object with sharp points or edges that can puncture or cut the skin, such as a needle. Watch the video to learn how to safely dispose of used sharps to keep your community safe.		Video on Safe Sharps Disposal: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo</a>
Used sharps/needles should never be thrown directly in the trash or recycling as this may cause injury. Use a sharps container and return to a pharmacy for safe disposal. It's everyone's responsibility to keep our community safe.		Link to poster: <a href="https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf">https://www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca/Portals/0/Topics/AlcoholandDrugs/Sharps_GBHU_2018.pdf</a>
Happy first day of Spring! With warmer weather, you may find sharps/needles that were hidden by the snow. Here are the proper steps for disposal if you find a needle/sharp on your property.	NA	Video on Safe Sharps Disposal: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kUzbmWYOdo</a>
Watch this video to learn how to make your own sharps/needle disposal kit. Kits are available from Grey Bruce Public Health, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.		Video on how to make a safe sharps disposal kit: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7tQc1wMHxg</a>