

# **Oregon State University Sharps Safety Program**

## **Contents**

Purpose .....	2
Applicability.....	2
Roles and Responsibilities.....	2
Integration with Laboratory Risk Assessment and Research Oversight.....	2
Introduction .....	3
Oregon Regulations .....	4
Sharps Injury Prevention Framework .....	4
General Expectations for Sharps Use.....	5
Sharps Training Requirements.....	6
Precautions During a Procedure That Involves the Use of Sharps .....	6
Precautions During Clean-up Following Procedures Involving Sharps.....	7
Precautions During and After Disposal of Used Sharps.....	7
Precautions for Improperly Disposed Sharps .....	8
Precautions for Glass Handling and Disposal .....	8
Evaluation and Use of Safety-Engineered Sharps.....	9
Emergency Procedures for Sharps Injuries and Exposures .....	10
Reporting Requirements.....	11
Sharps Injury Data Review & Program Evaluation.....	11
Program Review .....	12
References .....	13
Sharps Safety – Key Precautions.....	15

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



### Purpose

The purposes of this program are to:

- ensure that sharps are used and disposed of safely;
- provide a framework for safety awareness and training of laboratory personnel;
- establish procedures for reporting and follow-up of sharps-related injuries and exposures; and
- establish a mechanism for periodic review of program effectiveness.

### Applicability

This Sharps Safety Program establishes institutional requirements and expectations for the safe use, handling, and disposal of sharps at Oregon State University. The program applies to all research, clinical, and teaching activities where sharps are used and supports compliance with applicable federal, state, and university safety requirements.

Laboratories or units may implement additional procedures as needed, provided such procedures meet or exceed the requirements described in this program.

### Roles and Responsibilities

Principal Investigators and Supervisors are responsible for:

- Ensuring that sharps are used in accordance with this program
- Ensuring personnel complete required institutional training, including SciShield Sharps Safety training
- Providing and documenting task-, device-, and procedure-specific training based on applicable standard operating procedures (SOPs), including hands-on instruction where appropriate
- Ensuring that sharps injuries, exposures, and near-misses are promptly reported

Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) provides institutional oversight of the sharps safety program, including training support, incident review, trend analysis, and maintenance of sharps injury log requirements in accordance with OSHA and Oregon OSHA regulations.

The Biological Safety Officer (BSO) provides additional oversight for sharps use involving biological hazards, human source materials, and research subject to IBC review, and coordinates follow-up and reporting for exposures involving biological agents as required.

### Integration with Laboratory Risk Assessment and Research Oversight

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



Sharps hazards must be identified and addressed as part of laboratory-level risk assessments and research oversight processes. This includes consideration of:

- Types of sharps used
- Biological, chemical, or other hazardous agents associated with sharps use
- Procedural steps where injury is most likely to occur

For laboratories conducting work subject to Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) review or other regulatory oversight, sharps use and injury prevention measures must be consistent with approved protocols and applicable biosafety requirements.

### Introduction

Sharps-related injuries have been recognized as an occupational hazard in healthcare, research, and clinical environments for more than four decades. McCormick and Maki (1981) were among the first to systematically describe the epidemiology of needlestick injuries among healthcare personnel and to recommend prevention strategies such as educational programs, avoidance of recapping, and improved needle disposal systems. In 1987, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) formalized universal precautions, which included guidance on the careful handling and disposal of sharps to reduce exposure to bloodborne pathogens.

Early prevention efforts focused primarily on work-practice controls, barriers, and puncture-resistant disposal containers. While these interventions reduced certain types of injuries, multiple studies published between the late 1980s and early 1990s demonstrated that these measures alone produced only limited reductions in sharps injuries, particularly those occurring during handling and disposal. Improved outcomes were observed when prevention strategies emphasized communication, training, and system-level controls in addition to individual behavior change.

Universal (standard) precautions remain a foundational element of exposure prevention and are effective in reducing contact between blood or other potentially infectious materials and the skin or mucous membranes. However, personal protective equipment and work-practice controls have inherent limitations in preventing sharps injuries, as most protective equipment can be penetrated by needles. As a result, reliance on barriers alone cannot be expected to substantially reduce sharps injuries.

Despite decades of prevention efforts, sharps injuries remain common. The CDC estimates that approximately 385,000 needlestick and sharps-related injuries occur each year in the United States, an average of over 1,000 injuries per day. The true magnitude of the problem is likely underestimated due to persistent underreporting, with studies indicating that as many as half of occupational percutaneous injuries are never reported.

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



Data consistently show that a limited number of device types account for the majority of sharps injuries, particularly hollow-bore needles, which pose an increased risk of bloodborne pathogen transmission. Syringe needles, scalpel blades, and other sharps are routinely used in research, clinical, and teaching activities at Oregon State University.

The majority of sharps injuries are preventable and most often occur as a result of unsafe handling, improper disposal, or system-level deficiencies. These injuries pose risks to the physical and mental health of personnel, disrupt research and clinical operations, consume institutional resources, and expose the university to regulatory and legal consequences. For these reasons, Oregon State University maintains a comprehensive Sharps Safety Program that emphasizes prevention through elimination and substitution where feasible, use of safety-engineered devices, effective training, and continuous program evaluation.

### Oregon Regulations

Sharps disposal containers allowed by Oregon regulations are commercially available red, leak-proof, rigid, puncture-resistant containers and must have the universal biohazard symbol.

In the State of Oregon, state public health regulations require that the following items be discarded in sharps containers:

- 1) Used microscope slides.
- 2) Used glass culture tubes that have not been decontaminated.
- 3) Used hollow-bore needles or needle – syringe units.
- 4) Lancets.
- 5) IV tubing with needles attached.
- 6) Scalpel blades or disposable scalpels.

Employers covered by the Bloodborne Pathogens Standard are required to establish and maintain a sharps injury log in accordance with OAR 437-002-1035 and 29 CFR 1910.1030. The log must be maintained for a minimum of five (5) years and protect employee confidentiality.

These requirements align with the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division's adoption of the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.

### Sharps Injury Prevention Framework

Oregon State University applies a prevention-focused approach to sharps safety using the **Hierarchy of Controls**, consistent with CDC and OSHA guidance. The goal is to

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



eliminate or minimize the use of sharps wherever feasible and reduce the risk of injury through layered controls.

The Hierarchy is as follows:

- **Elimination/Substitution:** Sharps are eliminated or substituted with non-sharp alternatives whenever possible (e.g., plasticware in lieu of glassware, blunt instruments, needle-free systems).
- **Engineering Controls:** Safety-engineered sharps and sharps with engineered injury prevention features are evaluated and used whenever feasible, including retractable needles, self-sheathing needles, and shielded scalpels.
- **Administrative and Work Practice Controls:** Procedures, training, and work practices are designed to minimize sharps handling, prevent hand-to-hand passing of sharps, and ensure immediate disposal at the point of use.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** PPE is used to reduce exposure risk but is not relied upon as the primary means of sharps injury prevention.

This hierarchy is considered during procedure planning, training, device selection, and periodic program review.

### General Expectations for Sharps Use

Sharps must be used, handled, and disposed of in a manner that minimizes the risk of injury and exposure to personnel. The use of sharps must be limited to situations where no feasible alternative exists, and safer alternatives must be selected whenever possible.

Approved sharps disposal containers must be readily available at the point of use in all areas where sharps are handled. Sharps must be disposed of immediately after use at the point of use after use in accordance with applicable procedures described in this program.

Personnel are responsible for the safe handling and proper disposal of sharps they use. Sharps must not be left for another individual to manage or dispose of.

Sharps containers and related equipment must be selected, assembled, placed, and maintained in accordance with manufacturer instructions and applicable regulatory requirements. Containers must be appropriately sized, secured, and positioned to prevent injury.

Detailed procedural requirements for sharps handling, disposal, cleanup, improperly disposed sharps, animal-related sharps use, and glass handling are described in the sections that follow and must be followed at all times.

### Sharps Training Requirements

All personnel who use or may reasonably be expected to encounter sharps must complete both institutional and task-specific training appropriate to their assigned duties.

Institutional baseline sharps safety training is provided through the SciShield Sharps Safety training module. Completion of this training is required prior to initial sharps use and establishes minimum university-wide expectations for safe handling, disposal, and response to sharps-related injuries.

In addition to SciShield training, personnel must receive documented task-, device-, and procedure-specific training provided by the principal investigator or supervisor. This training must be based on applicable standard operating procedures (SOPs) and must include hands-on instruction, when appropriate.

Procedure-specific training must:

- Address the specific sharps devices, materials, and procedures used
- Include proper activation of safety features and safe disposal practices
- Cover response actions following injuries, exposures, or near-misses

Completion of SOP-based training must be documented by the supervisor or principal investigator and maintained in accordance with institutional requirements. Documentation may include training records, signatures, or other verification of competency.

Both institutional (SciShield) training and SOP-based training must be completed prior to work initiation and must be updated when procedures, devices, or hazards change.

### Precautions During a Procedure That Involves the Use of Sharps

During procedures that involve the use of sharps, personnel must maintain continuous awareness and control of the sharp device to minimize the risk of injury. Visual contact with the procedure site and the location of the sharp must be always maintained. When handling exposed sharps, personnel must remain aware of other individuals in the immediate work environment and take appropriate steps to control the position and movement of the sharp to prevent accidental contact or injury.

For procedures involving more than one individual, exposed sharps must not be passed hand-to-hand. A predetermined neutral zone or tray must be used for the placement and retrieval of sharps. Personnel must clearly communicate when a sharp is placed in or removed from the neutral zone.

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



When a procedure requires repeated use of a needle, scalpel, or other sharp instrument, the sharp must be re-sheathed between steps using an approved one-handed technique or a fixed device that enables one-handed re-sheathing. Two-handed re-sheathing is prohibited.

When safety-engineered sharps or sharps with engineered injury prevention features are used, the safety mechanism must be activated promptly upon completion of the procedure step. Personnel must visually or audibly confirm that the safety feature is fully engaged and locked prior to disposal.

### **Precautions During Clean-up Following Procedures Involving Sharps**

Following completion of any procedure involving sharps, personnel must conduct a deliberate and systematic cleanup to ensure that no sharps remain in the work area.

Procedure trays, benchtops, and other surfaces that contained materials used during the procedure must be visually inspected for sharps that may have been inadvertently left behind. This inspection must occur before waste materials are removed or surfaces are cleared.

Reusable sharps must be transported only in closed, rigid containers that are secured to prevent spillage of contents. Containers must be handled in a manner that maintains control of the sharps and minimizes the potential for injury during transport to decontamination or storage areas.

### **Precautions During and After Disposal of Used Sharps**

Used sharps must be disposed of immediately after use at the point of use and exclusively in approved sharps disposal containers. Sharps may not be disposed of with general waste or other biohazard waste in any manner that could create a risk of injury.

Prior to disposal, personnel must confirm that the sharps container is of sufficient size to fully accommodate the device. Hands must be kept behind the sharp tip during disposal, and personnel must avoid bringing their hands close to the container opening. Hands or fingers must never be inserted into a sharps container to facilitate disposal.

Sharps containers must be monitored to prevent overfilling. Personnel must visually inspect containers for signs of overfill, including sharps protruding from the opening. If overfilling is identified, a new sharps container must be obtained. Protruding sharps must be transferred to the new container using forceps or tongs; hands must not be used.

When disposing of sharps with attached tubing, personnel must maintain control of

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



both the sharp and the tubing to prevent recoil that could result in injury. Before moving or handling any sharps container, the exterior must be visually inspected for protruding sharps. If a hazard is identified, personnel must not attempt to correct the condition and must contact EHS at 541-713-SAFE for assistance.

When the manufacturer's marked fill line is reached, or at intervals specified by local procedures, the container must be closed and locked using the designed closure mechanism. Closed sharps containers awaiting final disposal must be stored in a secure area and handled with care.

For final disposal of full sharps containers, personnel must submit a hazardous waste pickup request through the EHS hazardous waste program. Requests are submitted via the EHS website under Hazardous Waste services (<https://ehs.oregonstate.edu/services/waste>).

### Precautions for Improperly Disposed Sharps

If an improperly disposed sharp object is encountered in the work environment, personnel must approach the device cautiously and always maintain control of hand positioning. Hands must be kept behind the sharp point to minimize the risk of injury.

Whenever possible, improperly disposed sharps must be retrieved using a mechanical device such as forceps, tongs, or a similar tool designed to maintain distance between the hands and the sharp. Direct handling of the sharp must be avoided.

If direct handling cannot be avoided, disposable single-use gloves (e.g., nitrile or equivalent) must be worn to provide a barrier against potential contamination. Gloves do not provide protection against puncture and must not be relied upon to prevent sharps injuries. Extreme care must be taken to always control the orientation of the sharp during handling.

If an improperly disposed sharp cannot be safely addressed by available personnel or tools, EHS must be contacted for assistance.

### Precautions for Glass Handling and Disposal

Broken glass presents a significant injury hazard, and contaminated glass presents an additional exposure risk. Cuts sustained from broken glass may serve as a portal of entry for infectious agents and must be prevented through appropriate handling and disposal practices.

Wherever feasible, plasticware must be substituted for glassware in procedures

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



involving cultures, blood, or other potentially infectious materials to reduce the risk of injury and exposure.

Broken glass must never be picked up by hand. Mechanical means, such as forceps, tongs, scoops, or other appropriate tools, must be used for the collection and handling of broken glass.

Uncontaminated broken glass must be discarded in a designated cardboard glass disposal container (e.g., containers available through OSU Chem Stores or equivalent commercially available containers).

When the container is full but not overflowing, the lid must be secured with strapping tape and the container disposed of through the normal waste stream in accordance with institutional procedures.

Glass that is contaminated, or potentially contaminated, including broken or unbroken culture tubes, flasks, or similar items, must be discarded in an approved sharps container. Contaminated glass must never be placed in cardboard glass containers.

When there is uncertainty regarding whether broken glass is contaminated, the glass must be treated as contaminated and disposed of in a sharps container.

### Evaluation and Use of Safety-Engineered Sharps

For procedures involving the use of sharps, the Principal Investigator or designee must evaluate whether **safety-engineered sharps** or sharps with engineered injury prevention features can be used without compromising the procedure.

Where feasible, safety-engineered sharps must be used for:

- Work involving human blood, body fluids, tissues, or other potentially infectious materials
- Research involving Risk Group 2 or higher biological agents

The evaluation and selection of sharps devices must be documented in the laboratory's risk assessment, Exposure Control Plan documentation, or other EHS-approved records.

If the use of a safety-engineered sharp is determined to be infeasible for a specific procedure, the Principal Investigator must document the rationale for non-use and identify alternative risk-reduction measures. This documentation must be made available upon request by EHS or regulatory authorities.

Safety-engineered sharps evaluations must be revisited when procedures change, new devices become available, or following a sharps injury or near-miss.

### Emergency Procedures for Sharps Injuries and Exposures

In the event of an injury involving a sharp instrument or object, personnel must take immediate action to reduce the risk of infection or other adverse health outcomes.

Immediately following a sharps injury, the injured individual must:

1. Allow the wound to bleed freely without squeezing or massaging the injury site.
2. Wash the affected area promptly and thoroughly with soap and water.
3. Apply an appropriate antiseptic using supplies from a first aid kit.
4. Notify the Principal Investigator or supervisor as soon as possible.
5. Seek medical evaluation as described below.

Medical evaluation must be obtained when a sharps injury involves, or may involve, exposure to blood, body fluids, tissues, or other potentially infectious materials. Injuries where the contamination status of the sharp is unknown must be treated as potential exposures to infectious material.

Prompt medical evaluation is required to determine the need for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and follow-up care in accordance with current CDC guidelines. Minor injuries involving uncontaminated sharps and no reasonable risk of exposure may not require professional medical care; however, all reporting requirements still apply.

### Accessing Medical Care

For non-emergency medical evaluation during normal operating hours:

- Students may obtain care through OSU Student Health Services (see OSU Student Health Services website for hours and contact information).
- Faculty and staff may seek care at an urgent care clinic, including:
  - Samaritan Walk-In Clinic – Corvallis
  - The Corvallis Clinic – Urgent Care

Contact information and hours of operation for these facilities should be confirmed prior to arrival.

For serious injuries, injuries requiring immediate attention, or exposures occurring outside of urgent care operating hours, individuals must go directly to:

- Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center, Emergency Department (24 hours)

If there is uncertainty regarding the severity of the injury or the need for emergency care, the situation must be treated conservatively and evaluated in an emergency

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



department.

All sharps injuries, exposures, and potential exposures must also be reported in accordance with OSU incident reporting and biosafety reporting requirements.

### Reporting Requirements

All sharps injuries, exposures, and near-misses, no matter how minor, must be reported as soon as possible through the OSU incident reporting system (Riskconnect; <https://risk.oregonstate.edu/>).

Faculty, staff, students, and affiliates may submit reports directly in Riskconnect.

Individuals experiencing a sharps injury or potential exposure must:

1. Report the incident to their supervisor or principal investigator.
2. Submit an incident report through Riskconnect as soon as practicable.

Reports entered into Riskconnect serve as the official institutional record and are used to meet Oregon OSHA and federal OSHA sharps injury log requirements, including record retention and confidentiality.

EHS is responsible for reviewing reported sharps incidents, maintaining the institutional sharps injury log, and evaluating trends to support continuous improvement and injury prevention.

Any incident involving potential exposure to bloodborne pathogens or other potentially infectious materials must also be promptly reported to the BSO ([biosafety@oregonstate.edu](mailto:biosafety@oregonstate.edu)).

Failure to report sharps injuries, exposures, or near-misses may result in follow-up by EHS or referral to institutional leadership, as appropriate.

### Sharps Injury Data Review & Program Evaluation

In addition to incident-specific follow-up, EHS will periodically review aggregated sharps injury and near-miss data collected through Riskconnect.

This review may include analysis of:

- Types and brands of sharps involved
- Tasks or procedures associated with injuries
- Work locations or environments
- Trends over time

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



Findings from data reviews may be used to inform updates to training, equipment selection, work practices, or other preventive measures. This process supports continuous improvement of the sharps injury prevention program.

### **Program Review**

The effectiveness of this sharps safety program should be reviewed after each sharps injury, accident, or exposure by the principal investigator or supervisor. Program-level findings identified through periodic aggregated data review may also be used to inform updates to this program.

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## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



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## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



### Sharps Safety – Key Precautions

*(For posting and quick reference)*

#### During Procedures Involving Sharps

- Maintain visual contact with the procedure site and the sharp at all times.
  - Control the position of exposed sharps and remain aware of others in the immediate work area.
  - Never hand-pass exposed sharps. Use a designated **neutral zone** or tray and announce placement or removal.
  - Recapping or re-sheathing sharps is **prohibited**. In rare circumstances where no feasible alternative exists and reuse is required for a specific procedure, re-sheathing may only be performed using an approved one-handed technique or engineered device, in accordance with approved procedures.
  - Activate safety features on engineered sharps promptly and confirm they are fully engaged before disposal.
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#### Cleanup After Procedures Involving Sharps

- Visually inspect trays, benchtops, and work surfaces for sharps before removing waste materials.
  - Transport reusable sharps only in **closed, rigid containers** secured to prevent spillage.
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#### Disposal of Used Sharps

- Sharps containers must be brought to and maintained at the point of use.
- Dispose of sharps **immediately after use and only** in approved sharps containers.
- Confirm the container is appropriately sized to safely accommodate the device prior to disposal.
- Keep hands behind the sharp tip and away from the container opening; never insert hands or fingers into a sharps container.
- Sharps containers must not be overfilled.
  - If sharps are protruding or the fill line has been reached, obtain a new container.
  - Use forceps or tongs to transfer protruding sharps; never use hands.
- Maintain control of tubing when disposing of sharps with attached tubing to prevent recoil.
- Inspect the exterior of sharps containers before handling or moving them.

## Sharps Safety

Reviewed / Revised May 2026



- If a hazard is identified, **do not attempt to correct it**; contact EHS.
  - Close and lock sharps containers at the manufacturer's marked fill line and store in a secure area pending disposal through the EHS hazardous waste program.
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### Improperly Disposed Sharps

- Keep hands behind the sharp point and handle with extreme care.
  - Use forceps, tongs, or other mechanical devices whenever possible.
  - Avoid direct handling unless absolutely necessary. If direct handling cannot be avoided, disposable single-use gloves (e.g., nitrile or equivalent) must be worn.
  - Gloves do not provide protection against puncture and must not be relied upon to prevent sharps injuries.
  - If the hazard cannot be safely addressed, contact **EHS for assistance**.
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### Glass Handling

- Substitute **plasticware for glassware** whenever feasible when working with infectious or potentially infectious materials.
  - Never pick up broken glass by hand—use mechanical means only.
  - **Uncontaminated glass**: dispose in designated cardboard glass containers.
  - **Contaminated or potentially contaminated glass** (broken or unbroken): dispose in a sharps container.
  - When in doubt about contamination status, **treat glass as contaminated**.
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### Emergency Response Reminder

- Wash sharps injuries immediately with soap and water.
  - Report all sharps injuries and near-misses through **Riskconnect Incident Portal**
    - <https://risk.oregonstate.edu/>
  - Seek medical evaluation for any exposure or potential exposure.
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### For Additional Guidance or Disposal Support:

Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) <http://oregonstate.edu/ehs>