

# Syringe Services Program Disposal Guide



Tennessee Code [§ 68-1-136a](#) outlines the objectives and services of a syringe services program in Tennessee, including “disposal of used needles and hypodermic syringes.”

The purpose of this document is to help agencies learn best practices for disposing syringes and related biohazardous materials, find disposal resources, develop a disposal process for injection supplies at Syringe Services Programs.

If you have any questions or need further guidance, please contact [SSP.Health@tn.gov](mailto:SSP.Health@tn.gov).

## GENERAL GUIDANCE

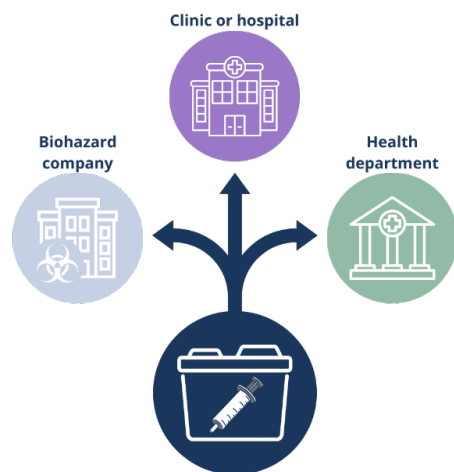
Typically, SSPs in Tennessee dispose of the collected used syringes and other biohazardous waste at one of three places: a biohazard company, a clinic or hospital, or their local health department.

With any third party, partnerships will likely include a letter of agreement (i.e., memorandum of understanding, or MOU, or a contract). There may also be specific requirements about disposal, such as the type of container that can be used or what types of materials they will dispose.

You may want to consider reserving funds in the budget to hire a private waste management service that will pick up and dispose of used syringes and sharps. In most cases, these services include any necessary supplies to properly package medical waste for disposal. Hiring a service is also useful to document proper disposal of equipment.

If your organization already has a waste management system, it's important to collaborate with them and find ways to best expand syringe disposal through existing hazardous waste disposal systems or new methods, such as standalone syringe disposal kiosks.

If there are other SSPs in your area, you can also consider reaching out to them to see where they dispose.



## DISPOSING SHARPS

In TN, SSPs must provide access to sterile needles/syringes AND **facilitate safe disposal of used syringes**. Among TN community-based SSPs, needles/syringes collected per month can range from about 3,000 (smaller rural) to 70,000+ (larger metro) syringes. Disposal amount is dependent on population size and operational capacity.

Sharps disposal containers are made from strong, puncture-resistant plastic with a tight-fitting, puncture-resistant lid, and is leak-resistant. Sharps waste containers come in a range of sizes dependent on amount collected (e.g., FDA-cleared sharp bin sizes range from less than a quart to several gallons of volume). For reference, a one-quart bin holds up to 500 needles or 36 syringes (up to 70 syringes depending on their size), and a two-gallon bin holds up to 200-400 syringes, depending on their size. The container size you choose should have enough room to store sharps safely between container changes.

Always put used sharps in a strong, plastic container with a secure lid for disposal and follow instructions from your disposing agency.



**1-qt container**  
Holds up to 500 needles or 36 syringes (depending on size)



**2-gal container**  
Holds up to 200-400 syringes (depending on size)

## Handling Sharps with Caution

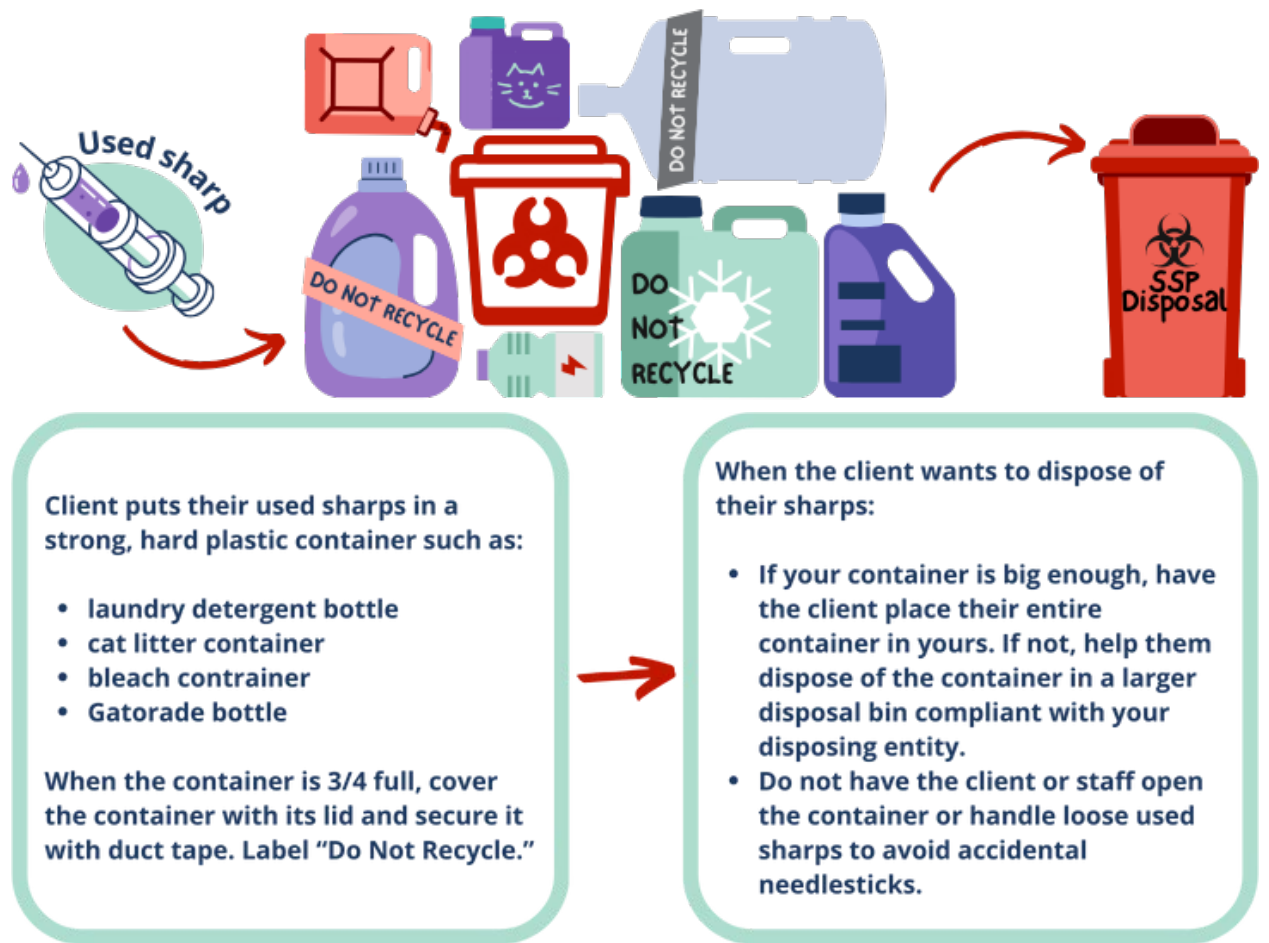
Proper handling of used sharps is important for SSP staff, volunteers, and clients to avoid accidental needle stick injuries. It is recommended to not directly handle used sharps. TN SSPs are required to report the number of needles/syringes distributed and collected. To protect staff and clients and reduce accidental needle stick injuries, the number of collected syringes can be an estimate. For example, a laundry detergent bottle that is three-quarters full holds approximately 200 needles/syringes. So, if a client brings in such a container, you can estimate that they are returning about 200 syringes.



Learn more about needlestick recommendations and protocols:

- [National Harm Reduction Coalition Needlestick Protocol](#)
- [CDC Sharps Safety for Health Care Settings](#)

## Best Practices for Client Disposal



## Additional Considerations

You may want to consider providing personal pocket sharps containers for SSP clients (example to the right and linked [here](#)). These personal pocket sharps containers usually have different slots for used and unused syringes. When the container is full, the client can place the entire container in a larger waste disposal container at your facility.

Another method for client disposal is the use of needle clippers (example to the right and linked [here](#)). The device cuts off the needle from the syringe and stores the needle in the device. Then, the syringe body can be disposed in in regular garbage. When the device is full, the client can dispose of the entire needle clipper in your hazardous waste container. Needle clippers can safely hold approximately 1,500 clipped needles, but typically only works with 28-31 gauge syringes.



**Fit-Pack Personal Container**

Holds up to 10 syringes;  
One side for sterile syringe storage,  
one side for used syringe storage



**Needle Clipper**

Stores approx. 1,500 needles  
of 28-31g

Helpful Links	Description
<p><b>List of SSPs in Tennessee</b></p>	<p>If there are other SSPs in your area that operate with a model similar to yours, consider reaching out to see where and how they dispose of syringes and other biohazardous materials.</p> <p>View the list of SSPs at: <a href="https://www.tn.gov/health/ssp.html">tn.gov/health/ssp.html</a></p>
<p><b>List of Local and Regional TN Health Departments</b></p>	<p>You can contact your local health department about a possible partnership to manage drop-off/collection of regulated medical waste.</p> <p>Occasionally, local health departments may have a syringe take-back program or dedicated day for <i>individuals</i> to return syringes.</p> <p>View all local and regional health departments at: <a href="https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/localdepartments.html">https://www.tn.gov/health/health-program-areas/localdepartments.html</a></p>
<p><b>US Food &amp; Drug Administration (FDA)</b></p>	<p>The US FDA has created recommendations for <i>organizations</i> to properly dispose of sharps.</p> <p>View the guidance here: <a href="https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safely-using-sharps-needles-and-syringes-home-work-and-travel/sharps-disposal-containers-health-care-facilities">https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safely-using-sharps-needles-and-syringes-home-work-and-travel/sharps-disposal-containers-health-care-facilities</a></p>
General Guidance for Clients	Description
<p><b>Safe Needle Disposal in Tennessee</b></p>	<p>This website provides general guidance for <i>individuals</i> needing to dispose of sharps in Tennessee.</p> <p>Learn more at: <a href="https://safeneedledisposal.org/states/tennessee/">https://safeneedledisposal.org/states/tennessee/</a></p>
<p><b>IGLiving Sharps 101: Safely Using Sharps Containers</b></p>	<p>This document shares disposal tips for anyone handling sharps, including how to use disposal containers other than the red biohazard containers.</p> <p>View the PDF guidance at: <a href="https://www.igliving.com/magazine/articles/IGL_2021-10_AR_Sharps-101-Safely-Using-Sharps-Containers.pdf">https://www.igliving.com/magazine/articles/IGL_2021-10_AR_Sharps-101-Safely-Using-Sharps-Containers.pdf</a></p>

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**Sacramento Harm Reduction Services Sharps Disposal 101 Graphic**

This harm reduction organization created a simple graphic to show alternative ways to dispose of sharps when regular biohazard containers are unavailable.

View the graphic at:

<https://www.facebook.com/HarmReductionServices/photos/a.4455370114490732/4554335207927555/?type=3>

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**US Food & Drug Administration (FDA)**

The US FDA has created recommendations for *individuals* to properly dispose of sharps.

View the guidance here:

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/safely-using-sharps-needles-and-syringes-home-work-and-travel/dos-and-donts-proper-sharps-disposal>

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**Stericycle**

[Stericycle](#) is a private medical waste management company that collect and dispose of syringes and other biohazardous waste. They also have resources to learn more about sharps disposal.

Understanding Sharps Waste & Proper Needle Disposal: <https://www.stericycle.com/en-us/resource-center/blog/sharps-needles-disposal-faqs>

4 Steps to Reliable & Consistent Sharps Disposal: <https://www.stericycle.com/en-us/resource-center/blog/four-steps-to-reliable-and-consistent-sharps-dispo>

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**Picture links**

- Stericycle 1 Quart Covidien Renewables Sharps Container, <https://store.stericycle.com/1-quart-covidien-sharps-container/8900sa-p/>
- Wetex 2 Gallon Biohazard Needle Disposal, <https://wetexmp.com/product/2-3-gallon-biohazard-needle-disposal/>
- Fit-Packs Individual 250ml Sharps Container with 2 Compartments, <https://www.savelives.com/fit-packs-individual-250ml-sharps-container-with-2-compartments-holds-ten-1ml-syringes-100-per-case>
- Needle Clipper Safe Clip Needle Removal Device, <https://www.skydentalsupply.com/insulin-syringe-needle-clipper.htm>