

# The Role of Sharps Waste Management Solutions in Nursing Staff Safety and Satisfaction

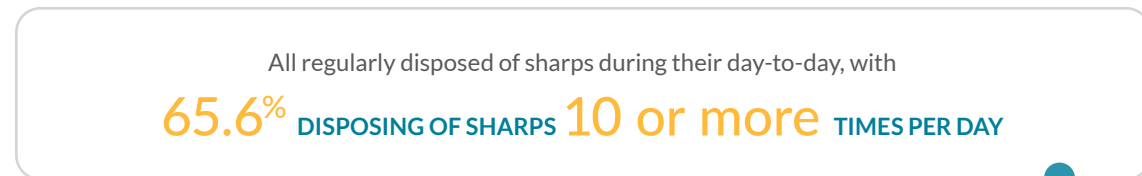
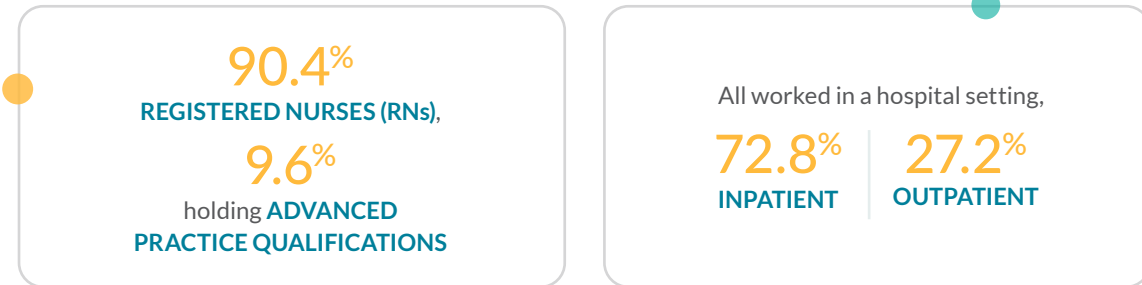
Medical waste management partners can offer efficiency and safety improvements to healthcare organizations' sharps waste management.



Nurses are integral stakeholders in the management of sharps waste, but if nurses must deal with full sharp containers, it can take them away from patient care and may increase the risk of needlestick injuries.

To dig deeper into the challenges nurses face and the role that medical waste management partners can play, Stericycle sponsored an independently administered nationwide blind survey of 125 randomly selected nurses in hospital and outpatient settings.

### Of the 125 survey participants:<sup>1</sup>



The following survey findings demonstrate that nurses value sharps waste management solutions that are simple and easy to use. A full-service sharps waste management solution, which consists of a dedicated and consistent container exchange schedule managed by a medical waste management partner, can support nurses by helping reduce the risk of needlestick injuries associated with overfilled containers.

### Highlights:

- Nurses handle sharps waste frequently during their workday, and according to a 2021 survey, nurses accounted for approximately 40% of needlestick injuries<sup>2</sup> experienced in certain healthcare settings
- Efficient, reliable sharps waste management solutions can help alleviate nurses' workloads by reducing the amount of time spent exchanging full sharps containers
- A full-service sharps waste management program can help improve safety by mitigating the risk of needlesticks associated with overfull containers
- Comprehensive instructional materials can help keep healthcare staff informed and engaged
- Sharps container design should match nurses' preferences while contributing to organizational sustainability goals



# Nurses handle sharps waste frequently during their workday, and account for approximately 40% of needlestick injuries.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 385,000<sup>3</sup> needlesticks and other sharps-related injuries are sustained by hospital-based healthcare personnel annually in the U.S. Continued focus should be placed on supporting nurses and solutions that can help mitigate their risk of experiencing sharps-related injuries.

Of the nurses surveyed by Stericycle, 66% of them reported disposing of sharps 10 or more times per day, with 19% disposing of sharps 4 to 9 times per day.<sup>1</sup> Their regular exposure to sharps waste could influence their risk of needlesticks. At least one other survey has found that nurses make up approximately 40% of needlestick injuries in certain healthcare settings.<sup>2</sup>

Needlestick injuries not only expose nurses and healthcare workers to the risk of infection via bloodborne pathogens, they can also impact healthcare organizations' bottom lines if nurses have to take sick time, require lab tests, or if the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) imposes penalties. Between October 2021 and September 2022, OSHA issued 93 bloodborne pathogens citations with an average cost of \$1,400 per citation.<sup>4</sup>

OSHA issued **93**  
**BLOODBORNE PATHOGENS**  
**CITATIONS** with an **AVERAGE COST**  
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per citation.<sup>4</sup>

**66%** of **NURSES** reported  
**DISPOSING OF SHARPS**

**10** OR MORE  
**TIMES PER DAY**,  
with

**19%**  
**DISPOSING OF SHARPS**

**4-9**  
**TIMES PER DAY**<sup>1</sup>



# Efficient, reliable sharps waste management solutions can help alleviate nurses' workloads.

Nurses are experiencing high levels of burnout and stress. A survey conducted by the American Nurses Foundation in January 2022, found that 60% of acute care nurses reported feeling burned out, and 75% reported feeling stressed, frustrated, and exhausted.<sup>5</sup> Insufficient staffing is a major reason why 52% of nurses are considering leaving their profession. These factors contribute to a projected 203,200 RN job openings per year, on average, between 2021 and 2031.<sup>6</sup>

An effective medical waste management solution should be exchange sharps containers before they are considered full, allowing nurses to focus on patient care instead. Stericycle's 2022 Healthcare Worker Safety Report found that 90% of healthcare workers believe that medical waste management is key to delivering the best patient care possible. Optimizing sharps waste management to set the ideal exchange frequency helps avoid overfilled containers and would be welcomed by nurses.

- Of those that participated in Stericycle's survey, 57% of nurses agreed that their organization would benefit from a more frequent sharps disposal exchange schedule to eliminate sharps disposal containers filled above the recommended fill line.<sup>1</sup>
- And 20% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization's approach to sharps waste management does not meet their needs.<sup>1</sup>

**57%** of **NURSES** agreed that their organization would benefit from a more frequent sharps disposal exchange schedule<sup>1</sup>

**20%** of **NURSES** AGREED or **STRONGLY AGREED** that their organization's approach to sharps waste management does not meet their needs.<sup>1</sup>

Among nurses surveyed, some of those with an in-house solution reported challenges in timely container replacement. For example:

"Often times the sharps containers are full and the nursing staff must replace the containers."

- Nurse at a hospital with in-house container exchange

"There is no schedule, and the nurses remove and replace [sharps containers]. This leads to frequent over-filling since nurses are busy and will try to shove one more thing in rather than take the time to remove and replace the bin."

- Nurse at a hospital with in-house container exchange

"It's difficult getting a full container replacement on nights, weekends, and holidays due to leaner staffing in EVS during these times."

-Nurse at a hospital with in-house container exchange

# A full-service sharps waste management program could help reduce the risk of needlesticks.

Needlestick injuries that can result in bloodborne pathogens exposure could be more likely when containers are full and care teams are exceptionally busy or distracted. The CDC's Stop Sticks campaign identifies the overfilling of sharps containers as a potential cause of sharps injuries and recommends the monitoring of fill levels as a mitigation measure.<sup>7</sup>

Partnering with a medical waste management company that can provide a full-service sharps waste management program with proactive container exchange can help hospitals ensure sharps containers are maintained and do not overfill. For example, one survey respondent reported:

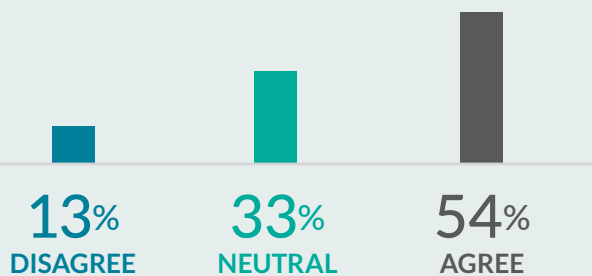
"With the current 3rd-party vendor schedule, the sharps bins are never to the line, and I feel safe using the style of bins provided. It reduces the time and paperwork in-house staff need to do the job effectively."

- Nurse at a hospital with Stericycle as a vendor

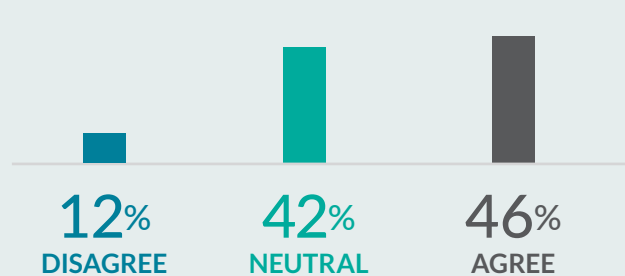


## Nurses at Healthcare Organizations with Medical Waste Management Partners

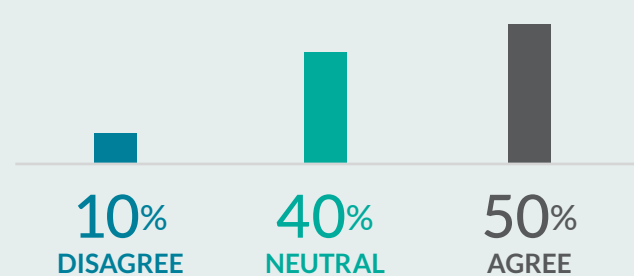
Based on my experience with sharps management at my organization, I would trust the current vendor for additional regulated waste disposal solutions and other services.



My organization's use of a third-party sharps management service improves overall employee safety.



My organization's use of a third-party sharps management service improves overall patient safety and contributes to our patient safety statics.



SOURCE: Stericycle sponsored independently administered nationwide blind survey of 125 randomly selected registered nurses (RNs) in hospital and outpatient settings in the US, December 2022

# Comprehensive instructional materials can help keep healthcare staff informed and engaged.

For sharps waste management solutions to be successful, it is critical to have in-depth training and ongoing support. The CDC's Stop Sticks campaign identifies proper education on sharps disposal as a key factor that can drive reductions in needlestick injuries.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the nurses surveyed by Stericycle (78%) agreed that instructional materials such as posters and handouts are helpful to understand proper sharps disposal, and 35% felt more training materials are needed for them and other nursing staff to safely utilize sharps containers. Many nurses described a specific need for laminated instructional posters to demonstrate proper waste segregation.<sup>1</sup>

**In order of importance, nurses view these materials as necessary and helpful resources for sharps waste management efficiency and compliance:**

**61%**  
POSTERS OR  
INFOGRAPHICS

**54%**  
IN-PERSON  
TRAINING

**49%**  
DETAILED  
INSTRUCTIONS

**30%**  
VIRTUAL  
TRAINING

**78%** of  
**NURSES AGREED** that  
instructional materials such as  
posters and handouts are helpful  
to understand proper  
sharps disposal.<sup>1</sup>

**For example,  
one respondent said that**  
“More education is needed on  
what actually should go in sharps  
containers versus not.”  
- Nurse at a hospital with an  
in-house service solution



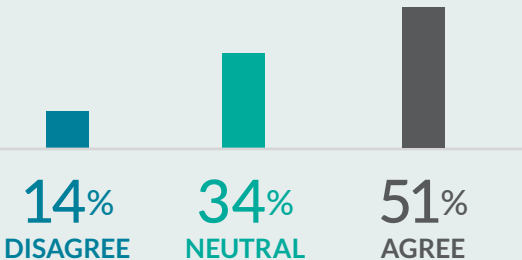
# Sharps container design should match nurses' preferences.

In addition to a full-service sharps waste management solution with proactive container exchange, the type of container used could also play a role in driving safe disposal. According to those surveyed by Stericycle, vertical containers are preferred overall by nurses. Stericycle offers both horizontal and vertical drop containers – to help match nurses' preferences and provide options that accommodate different types of sharps waste streams.

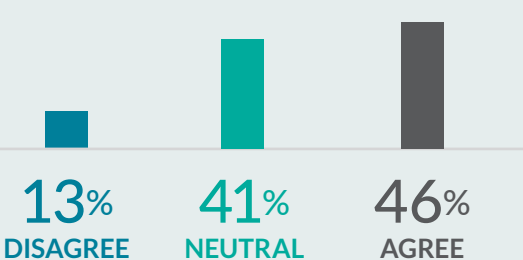


## Nurses' Sharps Container Design Preferences

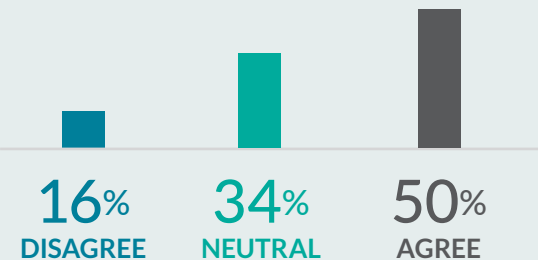
Sharps containers with vertical drop openings safely accommodate the size and type of sharps used for my needs.



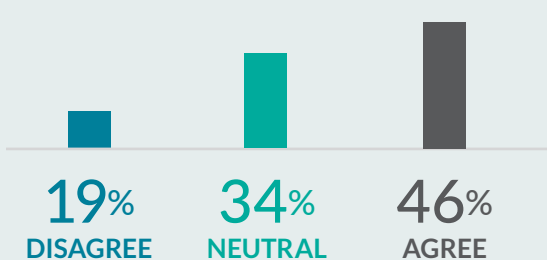
Sharps containers with vertical drop openings are safer than those with a horizontal opening.



Sharps containers with a vertical drop openings are easier to use than those with a horizontal opening.



I prefer sharps containers with a vertical drop opening over those with a horizontal opening.



SOURCE: Stericycle sponsored independently administered nationwide blind survey of 125 randomly selected registered nurses (RNs) in hospital and outpatient settings in the US, December 2022. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

**52%** of NURSES surveyed **AGREED THAT REUSABLE SHARPS CONTAINERS CONTRIBUTE** to their organization's **SUSTAINABILITY GOALS.**<sup>1</sup>



## Sharps container design can also contribute to sustainability goals.

A study published in 2020 found that, as of 2018, the U.S. healthcare sector contributed approximately 8.5% of domestic U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>8</sup> For this and other reasons, many hospitals and healthcare networks are taking steps to establish environmental stewardship goals. In 2021, a Practice Greenhealth survey of hospitals found that 88% of respondents have appointed or hired someone to lead their sustainability efforts.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 69% of surveyed hospitals now have a sustainable procurement policy.

Using reusable rather than single-use sharps containers for sharps waste management solutions can help support a hospital's sustainability goals. Nurses also recognize the role that reusable sharps containers could play in supporting sustainability efforts, with 52% of nurses surveyed by Stericycle agreeing that reusable sharps containers contribute to their organization's sustainability goals, while only 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The alignment between nurses' opinions and their organization's sustainability goals can be particularly important to help improve retention and loyalty. A recent survey of Gen Z and Millennials' job loyalty found that for the healthcare and life science segment, 41% of Gen Zs and 29% of Millennials planned to leave within two years.<sup>10</sup> The survey also found that when there is alignment between employees and their organization's efforts to commit to sustainability, employees planned to stay beyond five years.



# Stericycle provides sharps waste management solutions and resources to help nurses and the patients they serve.

Of the nurses surveyed who specified Stericycle as their current sharps waste vendor:

**89%** felt their organization had an **EFFECTIVE SHARPS WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**79%** **AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE** that **SHARPS SOLUTIONS** are **EASY TO ADAPT TO AND USE** in everyday clinical operations

**64%** **AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE** that **VERTICAL DROP OPENINGS ARE EASIER TO USE** than those with horizontal openings

**62%** **AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE** that their **REUSABLE SHARPS CONTAINERS** would or do **CONTRIBUTE** to their organization's **SUSTAINABILITY GOALS**



## In Conclusion

A full-service solution can help protect nurses from burdensome waste disposal duties and support short-staffed EVS departments. Findings in this survey show that a full-service solution that prevents containers from overfilling, the correct training tools, and containers that match nurses' preferences are important aspects to consider. Hospitals and integrated delivery networks should keep these in mind when implementing a sharps waste program so that nursing staff can dedicate their time to what matters most: patient safety and care.

**We protect what matters.™**

Visit [stericycle.com](https://stericycle.com) or call 866-783-6275 to learn more about Stericycle's sharps disposal solutions and how Stericycle can help you protect what matters.

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