

Full-Service Pharmaceutical Waste Disposal for Hospitals

Pharmaceutical waste management partners help improve training, waste segregation, and compliance in hospitals



A full-service pharmaceutical waste disposal service can help hospitals protect their staff and patients. Hospitals, nurses, pharmacists, and Directors also look for continuous training, waste segregation support, and reliable service to keep containers available for use.

Recognizing the importance of using data to support and drive decisions, Stericycle sponsored an independently administered nationwide blind survey with 200 respondents. The 2022 survey respondents indicated that 87% of nurses and pharmacists dispose of pharmaceutical waste four or more times per day and 46.5% of the total surveyed said they perform this task 10 or more times per day. These respondents are integral to pharmaceutical waste disposal and offer valuable opinions about the challenges faced, frequency of service, and training necessary to be efficient and compliant.

Of the survey participants:

75% were **PHARMACISTS** or had **NURSING POSITIONS** while the other

25% were **DIRECTORS OF PHARMACY** or **DIRECTORS OF NURSING**

All worked in an **ACUTE-CARE HOSPITAL SETTING**

99.5% of **PARTICIPANTS DISPOSED** of **PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE** at least **ONCE PER DAY**

The following results and quotes from the blind survey of registered nurses (RNs), pharmacists, and director-level decision-makers in hospital underscore how third-party vendors can help a healthcare provider improve processes and comply with applicable regulations.

Highlights:

- Challenges facing nursing and pharmacy departments concerning pharmaceutical waste
- Standardized education and training to help improve compliance
- Higher frequency of container exchanges to support internal teams by improving consistency and making it easier to comply with waste segregation requirements



Challenges facing nursing and pharmacy departments concerning pharmaceutical waste

Waste characterization is critical, especially related to regulatory requirements to identify and segregate hazardous waste pharmaceuticals from non-hazardous waste pharmaceuticals. The survey respondents indicated a few challenges that a pharmaceutical waste program should tackle which include staff training (63%), cost of waste disposal (56%), waste characterization (40%), and the availability of containers (36%). Nurses and pharmacists consider environmental (soil and water) protection a bigger challenge compared to Directors of Nursing and Directors of Pharmacy (22% vs 10%). On the other hand, Directors considered compliance with state and federal regulations a bigger challenge (40% vs 15%).

For respondents who indicated Stericycle exchanges containers for them (39 responses):

- 64% agreed or strongly agreed their third-party pharmaceutical waste management service improves overall patient safety with only 10% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that based on their experience with pharmaceutical waste management at their organization, they would trust the current vendor for additional regulated waste disposal solutions and other services with only 8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

In their own words:

The vendor “comes to empty and replace bins often. Meets my needs because you know it’s being handled and taken care of properly”

–Registered Pharmacist at a location with Stericycle Pharmaceutical Waste Service

64%

of Responders agreed or strongly agreed their third-party pharmaceutical waste management service **IMPROVES OVERALL PATIENT SAFETY**



Standardized education and training to help improve compliance

Nurses, pharmacists, and directors reported that their top challenges with pharmaceutical waste management involved education and training—specifically knowing how to classify hazardous and non-hazardous waste. According to the survey, 78% of the open-ended responses specifically named correct classification, segregation, and employee compliance as primary challenges. One way to help educate healthcare workers on how to properly segregate waste is posters.

On-site compliance training is critical and top of mind for nurses and pharmacy staff. They need detailed education, posters, visual aids, and ongoing support to meet pharmaceutical waste compliance requirements, minimize errors, and reduce drug diversion risk. A third-party vendor offers up-to-date, standardized, and ongoing training and educational materials for hospital staff and will make it a priority to meet organizational goals.

Training support is vital to success:

95.5%

said **TRAINING MATERIALS** would be helpful to understand how to **UTILIZE PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE CONTAINERS PROPERLY.**

34%

of **NURSES AND PHARMACISTS** do not feel they have adequate training materials to **DISPOSE OF PHARMACEUTICAL WASTE SAFELY.**

Top three tools nurses, pharmacists, and directors say they need:

71%
IN-PERSON
TRAINING

70%
POSTERS

65%

WASTE CHARACTERIZATION CHECKLISTS

As part of its full-service Pharmaceutical Waste Program, Stericycle offers in-person and web-based program training sessions, educational posters, waste identification and characterization assistance, and also ongoing follow-up surveys to help identify opportunities for improvement.

Higher frequency of container exchanges can help support internal teams by improving consistency and making it easier to comply with waste segregation requirements

Respondents were asked if they would prefer more frequent, same, or less frequent exchanges to gauge their satisfaction with their existing exchange frequency. Many reported that there could be an improvement in the frequency of container exchanges. More than half (51.5%) of the respondents would prefer a more frequent container exchange, 46% said no change was needed, and only 2.5% said less frequent changes would be preferable. A third-party specializing in this work can help identify and implement the ideal frequency and support higher frequencies if needed.

For organizations that manage their own container exchanges (118 respondents):

- 50% of respondents agreed—and only 16% disagreed—that their organization could improve pharmaceutical waste management installation and container exchange needs
- 46% agree—and only 26% disagree—their organization could improve waste segregation to meet compliance needs

Regarding compliance needs, one respondent indicated that:

“I oversee this personally, the only issue we have is time to ensure our monthly audits get completed, this is sometimes a challenge of ours.”

—Director of Pharmacy with in-house container exchange

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In Conclusion

For organizations that use a third-party solution, 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, that their pharmaceutical waste management service meets their waste segregation and compliance needs with only 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Stericycle's pharmaceutical waste solutions are designed for healthcare facilities to efficiently manage pharmaceutical waste. Our comprehensive services include full-service container exchange, waste characterization support, staff training, and on site audit support for your team members to help ensure safety and regulatory compliance.



In their own words:

“Quality of the service is good, it has met our needs in that everything has a place and gets disposed of safely for personnel and for the environment.”

– *Registered Pharmacist at a location with Stericycle Pharmaceutical Waste Service*

We protect what matters.SM

Contact Stericycle to learn about its full service pharmaceutical waste solution to support your staff with container exchange and waste segregation resources.

Visit [Stericycle.com/Pharmaceutical Waste](https://www.stericycle.com/Pharmaceutical_Waste) or call 866-783-6275.