

How-to Guide

Implementing Reusable Sharps Containers



Published in November 2025 by :



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UK Kidney Association

How-to Guide: Implementing Reusable Sharps Containers

Project: Sustainable Kidney Care – Implementing Best Practice

Collaboration: UK Kidney Association and Centre for Sustainable Healthcare

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Although this guide has been developed by experts in sustainability and sustainable kidney care, local teams should use their discretion in its implementation according to local context and requirements

Introduction



Transitioning from single-use to reusable sharps containers (RSCs) can significantly reduce environmental impact, improve operational efficiency, and potentially lower costs in healthcare settings. Evidence shows that 40 NHS hospital trusts reduced the carbon footprint of their sharps waste by 3,267.4 tonnes CO₂e, an 83.9% reduction—after switching to RSCs (Walker et al., 2021).

This guide outlines a step-by-step approach to support kidney centres in implementing reusable sharps container systems safely and effectively.

Step-by-Step Implementation

1. Engage Key Stakeholders

Early and inclusive stakeholder engagement is critical to ensure project success and staff buy-in (NHS England, 2020). Involve key departments such as:

- Infection Prevention and Control
- Health and Safety
- Waste and Environmental Services
- Procurement and Finance
- Clinical Leads (e.g. Nursing, Medical)
- Estates and Facilities Management
- Sustainability Lead – to ensure alignment with the organisation's Green Plan and Net Zero strategy

Clarify the rationale for the change, including safety, sustainability, and cost efficiency (Healthcare Without Harm, 2018).

2. Audit Current Sharps Container Usage

A baseline assessment helps to guide appropriate container selection and quantities. Key actions include:

- Auditing the types, locations, and sizes of current single-use sharps bins
- Recording replacement frequency and disposal methods
- Using this data to determine required quantities and logistics for RSCs (Royal College of Nursing, 2021)

3. Evaluate Supplier Options

Collaborate with Procurement to identify suppliers offering compliant and comprehensive services. Key elements to assess include:

- Container supply and rotation
- Collection and delivery logistics
- Cleaning, disinfection, and sterilisation processes
- Compliance with [HTM 07-01](#)
- Staff usability and satisfaction, ideally assessed through pilot trials

Resource Tip



Use the **NHS Supply Chain Roadmap** to help identify approved frameworks, timelines, and vetted suppliers for reusable sharps systems.

Access: [NHS Supply Chain – Roadmap to Sustainability](#).

4. Develop a Phased Implementation Plan

A staged rollout helps to manage risk and collect early feedback.

Your plan should define:

- Timelines and pilot area selection
- Collection and delivery routes
- Clean and used container storage areas
- Labelling and tracking systems
- Protocols for damaged or overfilled bins (Health Facilities Scotland, 2019)

Engage the **Infection Control Lead** early to ensure infection prevention measures are fully embedded.



5. Communicate the Change Clearly

Transparent communication ensures staff understand the reasons behind the change and how it affects their daily work. Key messages should include:

- The environmental and safety benefits of reusable systems (Walker et al., 2021)
- Instructions for proper use, including how to lock, secure, and store containers
- What to do if containers are full, damaged, or require urgent collection

Visual tools such as posters, reference cards, and bin-side stickers are effective in clinical environments.

Involve the **Sustainability Lead** in internal messaging to reinforce Green Plan objectives.



6. Provide Staff Training and Ongoing Support

- Comprehensive training is essential to ensure proper use and safety:
- Incorporate into staff induction and refresher training
- Offer practical demonstrations and/or short e-learning modules
- Nominate link staff or “green champions” to support peers during the rollout (Healthcare Without Harm, 2018)
- Ensure training is validated by both **Infection Control and Waste Management teams**

7. Monitor Progress and Evaluate Impact

Evaluation supports continuous improvement and demonstrates success.

Monitor:

- Container return and usage rates
- Incidents such as overfilling or misuse
- Infection control audit results
- Environmental and financial performance indicators (Walker et al., 2021)

Share results with the **Sustainability Lead** to support annual reporting and Green Plan updates.

8. Expand Across the Organisation

Once pilot areas have embedded the new process, expand rollout to other departments. Maintain:

- Ongoing communication and refresher training
- Regular monitoring and evaluation
- Staff support to resolve issues promptly (NHS England, 2020)

Review expansion plans with the Sustainability Lead and IC Lead to ensure consistency and compliance

9. Review and Optimise

Sustainability improvements require regular review. Consider:

- Periodic usage audits and feedback surveys
- Regular contact with the supplier to address issues
- Using performance data to support broader environmental goals (Department of Health and Social Care, 2013)
- Linking with **Sustainability and Infection Control leads** for continuous improvement and system optimisation

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