

Where Does the Waste Go?

The following flow chart may be used as a guide to aid staff in determining the appropriate disposal method for pharmaceutical waste.

I have a waste pharmaceutical. Where does it go now?

Can the pharmaceutical be used again? Some multi-dose vials such as insulin may be used more than once.

YES – Follow facility guidelines for pharmaceuticals that may be used for multiple doses or for redistribution.



NO – The item may not be used again and cannot be restocked. Next, determine whether the item may be returned for credit.

Is there a reasonable expectation of full or partial credit for the pharmaceutical? Items that are expired, have slightly damaged packaging or are overstock may be returned for credit. Evaluate over-the-counter medications sold both in front of and behind the counter for reverse distribution potential (e.g., nicotine patches and gum).

YES – The item may be returned for credit through an authorized reverse distributor that has been issued an ID number.



NO – There is not a reasonable expectation of credit for this item (e.g., spill residues, loose pills, samples). Next, determine if the waste is a hazardous waste.

Is the item a listed hazardous waste or does it exhibit a characteristic making it a hazardous waste? Some pharmaceuticals may be ignitable, corrosive or toxic.

YES – The item is considered hazardous waste and must be managed as hazardous waste or Universal Pharmaceutical Waste.



NO – The item does not exhibit a characteristic and it is not a listed hazardous waste. Next, determine if the item is trace chemotherapy or biohazardous waste.

Did the item contain chemotherapy medications that are not considered hazardous? Is the item considered infectious or dangerous to human health? Some pharmaceuticals, while not hazardous waste, may still be considered trace chemotherapy or biohazardous waste.

YES – Items should be evaluated and appropriately managed based on biohazardous and/or trace chemotherapy regulations.

NO – The item may likely be disposed of in solid waste trash dependent upon facility policy.

Disclaimer: This poster is for guidance purposes only. It is not official rule language and does not include a comprehensive listing of all environmental regulations that may be applicable to facilities.

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