

Waste disposal

Guidance on the safe disposal of different kinds of optometric waste



Summary

As a producer of waste, optometry practices in the UK need to comply to the regulations on safe disposal. This guidance for members includes a recommendation to have practice protocol on waste disposal procedures, advice on how to dispose different types of waste, and specific advice for domiciliary providers.

Waste disposal handout

[Download the waste disposal handout \(PDF\)](#)

- Appropriate disposal of different types of waste
- Advice for domiciliary providers

Background

Optometry practices produce a variety of different types of waste. All waste producers have a legal 'duty of care' to dispose of this waste safely and to transfer controlled waste to an authorised person, for transport to an authorised waste site. This is detailed in section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The law varies in different parts of the UK; in Scotland, this is detailed in The Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012.

Several items of waste produced within the optometric consulting room are considered as healthcare waste (this is known as 'special waste' in Scotland); as such, they cannot simply be disposed of in the general waste.

The accepted way to comply with the regulations on waste disposal is to have a contract with a registered waste disposal contractor. The contractor comes to the practice to remove non-hazardous and hazardous waste when required.

We recommend having a practice protocol on waste disposal procedures as evidence of duty of care. Practices should keep all waste transfer or consignment notes, and the length of time practices are required to keep these for will vary depending on the type of waste. The waste transfer notes for non-hazardous waste should be kept for more than two years and consignment notes for hazardous waste should be kept for more than three years.

Appropriate disposal of different types of waste

Across the UK there is a standardised colour coding system for waste segregation based on content and risk. Waste should be segregated based upon type. While there are multiple options, bag, bin, and rigid container for many categories, it is important to remember that sharps must be separate from non-sharps. That may mean multiple containers of each colour depending on specific circumstances.

1. General domestic waste - Black stream 'black bags or similar'

This can be disposed of in the normal way. Scotland allows small quantities of hygiene/offensive waste, quantities of up to 7kg to be disposed of via black bags. In the other countries, domestic waste must not mix at all with non-offensive or offensive waste. Unused contact lenses can be considered as general waste, but recycling options where available, are preferential.

2. Non-hazardous 'offensive' waste - Yellow/black stream 'tiger bags'

This includes disposable tonometer heads, used iCare probes (in their protective sheath), used Tono-pen sheaths and unused contact lenses. It also includes PPE if it isn't contaminated with infectious fluids, chemicals, or radiation, as well as swabs and dressings where the patient is not infectious. These items are classed as 'offensive' waste and should be disposed of in a yellow and black striped 'tiger' bag for municipal incineration; they can go to landfill, but this is discouraged. Sharps must not be placed into a tiger bag.

3. Non-hazardous pharmaceutical waste - Blue stream

This includes used or out of date minims and fluorets, as well as other expired medicines or used minims. These should be disposed of in a medicine disposal box which must have a blue rigid lid. These will then be incinerated. Disposal transfer notes for this type of waste should be kept for at least two years.

4. Hazardous waste/infectious waste - Yellow stream

This type of waste requires specialist disposal and a consignment note for hazardous waste from the waste contractor. This type of waste includes sharps used for foreign body removal such as needles, but also iCare probes where the protective sheath has been lost. Disposal boxes are normally all yellow and if they are to be used for sharps must be of a rigid construction. Consignment notes for this type of waste should be kept for at least three years.

5. Hazardous waste/cytotoxic and cytostatic waste - Purple stream

This type of waste requires specialist disposal and a consignment note for hazardous waste from the waste contractor. The most encountered optometric example is chloramphenicol. Disposal boxes should be rigid and have a purple lid. The waste will then be incinerated. Consignment notes for this type of waste should be kept for at least three years

The safe disposal of healthcare waste is detailed in the government publication Safe management of healthcare waste.

GENERAL ADVICE

We advise members to follow five steps:

- Always separate clinical and general waste
- Never mix sharps and non-sharps in the same container
- Store waste securely
- Store all hazardous waste separately to non-hazardous waste (this is a legal requirement)
- Hire a suitable waste contractor and keep appropriate records of waste disposal undertaken.

Advice for domiciliary providers

Domiciliary contractors should register as a waste carrier to transport used minims from a domiciliary visit to the base location where they will be disposed. You can register on the Gov.uk website – follow this link to start the process.





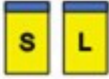
You will be a lower tier carrier as you will only carry waste you produce while carrying out your own business and registration is free.

If you are employed or contracted to provide services by someone who has a GOS contract, using the practice's disposal contract is accepted and you don't need to register separately. If

you have your own GOS contract, NHS England will require you to have your own waste disposal contract.

The container used to transport items back to the practice for disposal must meet certain requirements. The Royal College of Nursing has advised its staff working in a community setting that a leak-proof plastic drum type package is suitable for liquids, or waste that may contain free liquids such as partially discharged syringes. Those marked as meeting "UN approved" are certified as of a high quality and unlikely to leak. Any containers that are not pre-labelled should be clearly marked to indicate that they contain medical waste.

Minims and similar would appear to be the equivalent in optometry and a similar approach should be taken. If sharps are used, they must be placed in and transported in a sharps bin.

Example items	Waste type	Hazard	Container	Colour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used non-infectious PPE tonometer heads including iCare probes (in protective sheath) Cotton buds - non infectious eye Tissues and disinfecting wipes - non-infectious PVA spear - non infectious eye Used contact lenses Empty expired contact lens solutions - if remaining solution drain into sewer first 	Non hazardous 'Offensive'	Unpleasant, generally not hazardous	Tiger stripe bag	Yellow & Black 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-sharps Schirmer strips Used fluorescein strips Sharps Needles, disposable tweezers, iCare probe without protective sheath 	Infectious/medical	Infectious/medical contamination	<p>Depends on characteristics of waste</p> <p>Sharps need an approved sharps bin</p> <p>Bags if applicable should be housed in a suitably colour coded and labelled pedal bin.</p>	Yellow 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infectious dressings or swabs and infected PPE Tissues and disinfecting wipes - infected eye Cotton buds - infectious eye PVA spear - infectious eye 	Known infectious	Infection	<p>Depends on characteristics of waste</p> <p>Sharps need an approved sharps bin</p> <p>Bags if applicable should be housed in a suitably colour coded and labelled pedal bin.</p>	Orange 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cytotoxic/cytostatic medicines Chloramphenicol waste 	Cytotoxic and cytostatic	Cytotoxicity	<p>Depends on characteristics of waste</p> <p>Other waste contaminated with cytotoxic: purple striped bag</p> <p>Sharps need an approved sharps bin</p> <p>Medicines: solid or liquid must go in a rigid bin</p>	Purple 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expired medications Used minims and expired minims Expired fluorescein strips or others such as Lissamine green 	Medicinal waste	Chemical/ environmental	<p>Depends on characteristics of waste</p> <p>Blue lidded bin based on physical properties (sharps go in a sharps bin, liquids go in a liquids bin, and solids in a solids bin).</p> <p>Bags may be used if they are in a blue-lidded or primarily blue container.</p> <p>Medicinal waste should not be stored in loose bags</p>	Blue 
Any items that have sharp edges and may rip, puncture or tear a bag should be treated as sharps and disposed of in an approved sharps box.				

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