

# Safety Alert

**Number: 23-08**  
**Subject: Sharps**

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## What Happened / Narrative

An MSF member company recently reported an incident whereby a box of expired medical stores was landed for disposal by a vessel in a recycled cardboard box. The box contained expired needles; however, several packages were compromised, and the needles protective shield had dislodged. This increased the risk of anyone handling this box and the contents to a needle stick injury. The packaging for these needles can easily be compromised, just by rough handling or throwing them in a box for disposal may cause the needle to be exposed from the protective sterile packaging.



“Sharps” is a medical term for devices with sharp points or edges that can puncture or cut skin.

Although the practice of landing unused medical “Sharps” as defined above is normal and acceptable the use of a cardboard box is not considered good practice.

## Corrective Actions Taken / Recommendations

The following was reinforced with the vessel crew and owner’s fleet:

### To safely dispose of Sharps, you should:

- Obtain a medical sharps container from a pharmacy. It should be heavy plastic or metal with a puncture-proof, tight-fitting lid
- Do not throw loose needles, syringes, lancets or any sharps in the trash or recycling
- If needles are to be recapped; you must use tongs, a recapping device or one-handed scoop method to recap the needle. Never recap needles using one hand to hold the cap and the other to hold the needle!
- Keep sharps pointed away from yourself and other workers
- Avoid leaving exposed sharps unattended
- Immediately dispose of sharps after use
- Store sharps in a safe way
- Do not attempt to bend, shear or otherwise tamper with a sharp
- Transport sharps in a lidded, rigid, puncture-proof, labelled container

### Lessons Learned:

- Although unused, this was not the safest method to dispose of Sharps, there was also a high potential for anyone handling this box being subjected to a ‘Needle Stick Injury’
- The handling and landing of Sharps, whether used or just out of date for disposal should be fully Risk Assessed

### Additional Actions Taken Onboard:

- Vessel Master raised the matter with the vessel Advanced Medical Aider (AMA). Medical stores whether expired or used are to be securely and safely packaged to prevent causing harm.

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