Needlestick prevention has become a hot topic over the last few years and with good reason. The CDC estimates that each year 385,000 needlesticks and other sharps-related injuries are sustained by hospital-based healthcare personnel; an average of 1,000 sharps injuries per day,\(^1\) a staggering statistic. Throughout the last twenty years, many advances have been made to protect healthcare personnel from sharps injuries. In 2001, significant progress was made through the “Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act” to ensure the evaluation and implementation of safer devices. Although personnel safety is the most important consideration, facilities can also look at sharps evaluation as a cost-saving measure. The costs of a needlestick injury can include direct costs such as follow-up treatment of exposed healthcare personnel and indirect costs, such as employee’s medical leave.

Sharps evaluations are an integral part of a successful needlestick prevention program. OSHA requires annual sharps evaluations as outlined in the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard:

\[
\text{1910.1030(c)(1)(iv)(B)} \quad \text{Document annual consideration and implementation of appropriate commercially available and effective safer medical devices designed to eliminate or minimize occupational exposure.}
\]

\[
\text{1910.1030(c)(1)(v)} \quad \text{An employer, who is required to establish an Exposure Control Plan shall solicit input from non-managerial employees responsible for direct patient care who are potentially exposed to injuries from contaminated sharps in the identification, evaluation, and selection of effective engineering and work practice controls and shall document the solicitation in the Exposure Control Plan.}^2
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Although the task may seem daunting, sharps evaluations can be easily performed and with the aid of healthcare personnel, can be completed in a timely manner. CDC outlines eleven steps that can assist your facility and make the process go very smoothly.

1. **Organize a product selection and evaluation team**
   The first step in the sharps evaluation process is assembling a team. Keep in mind, you need team members with various expertise and job functions. The most important team members, however, are the employees who actually use the devices. Their input is invaluable to this process and is required by OSHA.

2. **Set priorities for product consideration**
   To avoid confusion, it is best to choose one type of product to evaluate at a time. This can avoid unforeseen compatibility problems. Find areas where your sharps program may be weak and focus on those devices. For example, if sharps disposal is an area you may not feel up-to-date, evaluate various types of sharps containers.

3. **Gather information on use of the conventional device**
   Before evaluating new devices, the team must first become knowledgeable of the device they are
8. Develop and implement a product evaluation plan
According to the CDC, there are five steps to this process:

- **Select clinical areas for evaluation** - Include representatives from all areas with different needs. Opinions from both new and experienced staff can be very enlightening.

- **Determine the duration of the evaluation** - Two to four weeks is suggested but your facility must determine the amount of time suitable for your needs.

- **Plan for staff training** - An understanding of how to use the device properly is essential; therefore, training is a must. Training should include why the change is being proposed, an explanation of the evaluation process, and what is expected of the participants.

- **Determine how products will be distributed for evaluation** - It is best to remove the usual device from the evaluation area and completely replace it with the device under study. Have the conventional device as back-up only if the new product does not meet an immediate need.

- **Determine when and how end-user feedback will be obtained** - Feedback can first be obtained informally and shortly after the onset of testing. This can provide preliminary results and may also reveal problems that require terminating the evaluation early. The second stage of feedback entails distribution of the product evaluation forms. Provide these forms as soon as the evaluation period is complete.

9. Tabulate and analyze results
Compile the data from all survey forms. Once all data is scored, the responses can be broken down by different variables, such as clinical area and job function. This can detect differences in opinion influenced by variations in clinical needs.

10. Select and implement preferred product
Once user feedback and other factors are considered, the team should make a product selection. If a new product is to be implemented,
the change should occur systematically and provide training to all end-users. A back-up plan should be in place just in case the product is unable to meet the needs of all facility personnel.

11. **Monitor post-implementation**

Follow up by observing and responding to any issues not considered during the initial evaluation period. This can be accomplished by assessing and documenting staff competence with the new device. Also, to ensure the best decision was made for your staff, periodically assess various factors encountered when using the new device such as ease of use, patient response, sample quality, and problem incidents (such as needlesticks).

Ensure that all evaluations and assessment records are retained, and that collection policies and procedures are revised as appropriate, to reflect the proper use of new products.

Sharps safety is very important to and should be taken seriously by all healthcare personnel. Sharps evaluations are an excellent tool to get staff involved in making their workplace safer. By creating a safety culture in your facility, your personnel feel more valued and it can, in turn, improve employee morale!

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**Revised by Tracey Shives, BSMT (ASCP)**

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**References:**


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[State of North Carolina • Roy Cooper, Governor](http://www.ncdhhs.gov • www.publichealth.nc.gov)

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