Average Annual Savings Potential
**$50K – $300K**

# Guide for Reducing Red Bag Waste

## What is Red Bag Waste?

Red Bag Waste, also known as Regulated Medical Waste (RMW), is biohazardous waste that is capable of producing an infectious disease in humans. RMW includes, at a minimum, blood, body fluids, discarded sharps, inoculated culture media, tissues, and slides.[1]

## Unnecessary Waste

**32 lbs** Average amount of total waste generated per hospital bed per day[2]

**30%** Estimated amount a typical hospital can reduce its RMW[2]

## Avoidable Costs

**5X** Cost of RMW disposal for organizations putting incorrect items in red waste bags compared to costs of properly segregated RMW[3]

**13X** Cost of disposing RMW compared to cost of disposing regular trash[4]

**$200,000** Amount saved annually by 900-bed Inova Fairfax Hospital by reducing red bag waste[5]

## 10 Steps for Reducing Red Bag Waste

**1 Define Regulated Medical Waste**
RMW is defined by each state, but hospitals also must be in compliance with OSHA and US Department of Transportation regulations. Ensure that RMW policies are in line with both state and federal regulations.

**2 Assess the Situation, Scope the Problem, Analyze Costs and Benefits**
Scope the issues within your RMW streams and perform a cost/benefit analysis in order to deploy a targeted solution and track results.

**3 Create a Team, Set Goals, Develop an Action Plan**
Establish a multi-disciplinary team that includes representatives from Environmental Services, Infection Control, Nursing, Safety, Facilities, Employee Education, Employee Health, Laboratory, and clinicians. Delegate a leader, review processes in each department, and a point person for each department or ward to educate staff.

**4 Simplify Waste Segregation**
Provide the proper tools for employees to easily implement waste segregation. Work with department heads and nurse managers in each area to determine the types and volumes of wastes generated. Work with Communications to develop educational information including posters, receptacle labels, newsletters and employee training.

**5 Determine Optimal Container Placement/Size and Use Good Signage**
Proper container size, placement, and signage are critical to the success of any waste segregation program. Establish centralized bin locations or remove containers from areas where they are unnecessary, such as patient rooms.

**6 Educate and Incentivize Best Practices**
Include RMW training in new employee orientation. Work with executive team to hold department heads accountable for RMW generation and associated disposal costs, tracking disposal rates within departments. Consider developing incentives or competitions to involve all staff.

**7 Review Your Specialty RMW Streams**
Critically examine sharps management, prioritizing safety. Consider a reusable sharps container program. Also assess the flow of liquid waste and “trace” chemotherapy waste to ensure efficient and safe practices.

**8 Communicate with Waste Management Vendor**
Develop a good working relationship with anyone handling your organization’s waste. Compile a written protocol for any segregation issues with waste treatment facilities and landfill operators. Develop a contamination response plan, a waste monitoring form, and a mechanism to report concerns and appropriate solutions swiftly back to staff.

**9 Choose RMW Disinfection Method**
RMW must be “disinfected” before disposal, destroying or killing infectious micro organisms with a potential to cause disease. Requirements and acceptable treatment methods vary by state. Treatment technologies rely on two approaches to sterilization: excessive heat or chemical agents. Weigh options according to cost, energy usage, and practicality.

**10 Track Progress, Report Successes, Reward Staff**
Track the positive changes in your waste volumes and celebrate these waste reductions and cost savings. Reward staff for their efforts! Let the community know about your successes. Inform hospital administrators about cost savings.

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# Identifying Red Bag Waste

### Types of Waste to PLACE in Red Bag

| Type of Waste | Place in Red Bag |
|---|---|
| Fluid Blood | ✓ |
| Blood-Saturated Items | ✓ |
| Intravenous Bags and Tubing | ✓ |
| Suction Canisters | ✓ |
| Chest Drainage Units | ✓ |
| Hemodialysis Products | ✓ |

### Types of Waste to NOT PLACE in Red Bag

| Type of Waste | Place in Red Bag |
|---|---|
| Garbage | ✗ |
| Sharps | ✗ |
| Pathology Specimens | ✗ |
| Hazardous Waste | ✗ |
| Medication | ✗ |
| Gloves (no blood) | ✗ |

## Reducing Misuse of Red Bag Waste Containers

### Process of Removing RMW from a Patient's Room

RMW is produced in the patient's room

Nurse places RMW in individual red bag

Nurse immediately removes red bag from room

### Other To-Dos

1. Size red bag containers at **eight gallons or fewer**[6]
2. Place signage directly on the lid and **display biohazard label clearly**
3. Ensure solid waste receptacles are **emptied regularly**

### Case in Brief: University of California, San Francisco Medical Center

- 600-bed teaching hospital in San Francisco California
- To eliminate overuse of red bags, UCSF removed red bag bins from patient rooms and instead placed a small roll of red bags in a drawer of each patient's room
- Nurse is responsible for immediately taking red bags to soiled utility room

Have a sustainability tactic you want to share?
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1) http://www.unmc.edu/academicaffairs/docs/ClinicWst.ppt
2) http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20140927/MAGAZINE/309279984?AllowView=VXQ0UnpwZTVBL2FaL1I3TkErT1IBajNja0U4VUErUmFFQk1JQUE9PQ%3D%3D
3) http://www.modernhealthcare.com/article/20140927/MAGAZINE/309279984?AllowView=VXQ0UnpwZTVBL2FaL1I3TkErT1IBajNja0U4VUErUmFFQk1JQUE9PQ%3D%3D
4) http://wsppn.org/pdf/hospital/04_2%20Minimizing%20RMW_AZ.pdf
5) http://healthierhospitals.org/sites/default/files/IMCE/public_files/Case_Study_Images/Inova.pdf
6) http://blog.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/sustainability/?m=201302

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