

# Sample and Drug Checking Waste Disposal

## Summary

Working with drug samples generates waste comprised of either used consumables (such as paper flaps, baggies, medicine cups or stir sticks) or drugs themselves. It is essential to have procedures in place that manage drug checking waste to keep people safe from potential exposure. Another important task is to divert substances from waste disposal systems that are not secure or designed to handle substances that can cause human or environmental harms.

The following procedure describes methods of disposal for drugs and contaminated consumables generated by drug checking services. Drug checking services should ensure any of their waste disposal protocols are in compliance with any pre-existing biohazard protocols that may exist at a site. Safe disposal of drugs is a requirement of sites with SCS (supervised consumption site) designations and improper disposal could put this designation at risk.

Of note, the environmental impact of drug checking waste has not been established, in particular, water left over from test strips. Therefore, these procedures do not claim to prevent environmental waste but aim to avoid it where possible.

## Description

There are three types of waste produced by drug checking services: used consumables, waste water and drugs.

1. **Used consumables:** items that are required to perform drug checking services which subsequently require disposal after. Examples include: medicine cups, alcohol pads used for cleaning, task wipes, and immunoassay strips. May also include items used to consume or store drugs such as: plastic baggies, paper flaps, cookers, or cottons.
2. **Waste water:** water used for testing drugs with immunoassay strips (fentanyl and benzo strips).
3. **Drugs:** a sample left over after testing may also need to be safely disposed if a service user requests it (i.e., does not want them returned) after receiving the results of their drug check or if a left-over sample is not retrieved at the end of the drug checking shift.

Where possible, it is best to dispose of all types of waste from drug checking in a biohazard disposal bin. A drug checking worksite should include a garbage bag close to the testing area where all waste is disposed of during a shift. After that shift, the bag is put into the biohazard disposal bin. Check to see if the drug checking site has existing protocols for biohazard disposal in place already.

However, biohazard disposal is not always possible. The following outlines options for disposing of the different types of waste.

Disposal Methods	Examples
Regular garbage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any consumable with residue such as test strips, plastic tubes for testing benzos, alcohol swabs, task wipes, and any other materials used to check drugs, or baggies or flaps with only residue left in them.</li> </ul>
Activated charcoal or kitty litter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waste water from testing</li> <li>Left over drug sample (mix in water first)</li> </ul>
Biohazard bins (recommended)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any consumable that may have more than residue such as baggie or flap with useable amount of drug.</li> <li>Waste water from testing</li> <li>Left over drug sample</li> </ul>

Disposal depends on the amount of drug present. Items contaminated with drug residue (e.g., medicine cups, empty baggies or flaps) can be disposed of in the regular garbage. However, if the amount present on the item is more than residue (i.e., collectable or usable), it should be treated as biohazard waste and discarded appropriately and safely.

Items with drug amounts that are collectable or consumable, such as a baggie with a usable amount of substance left over, should be considered biohazard waste. A biohazard bin is the preferred method. If biohazard disposal is unavailable, items can be disposed of in a manner that deactivates the drug and renders it unusable, such as activated charcoal or kitty litter. After a drug is deactivated, it can be thrown away in the garbage.

### **Biohazard bins**

Biohazard bins are tamper-proof and prevent someone attempting to reach inside. These bins are picked up and incinerated by a service that is approved to dispose of biohazard waste; therefore, there are no environmental hazards. Any amount larger than a single dose of the particular drug should be disposed of as per site policy (e.g., disposal safe). In particular, SCS are mandated to have safes onsite for drug disposal. Not making use of them can put their federal exemption at risk. The simplest way to control drug checking waste is to dispose of all waste (including test strips and water, task wipes, medicine cups) into a garbage bag during a drug checking shift. At the end of the shift, dispose of the bag and its contents in a biohazard bin.

### **Activated charcoal or kitty litter:**

Approved drug deactivation disposal includes activated charcoal disposal methods (e.g., single-use drug disposal pouches such as Deterra Pouches). In the absence of biohazard waste bins or activated charcoal pouches, a container of kitty litter can be used to dispose drug-contaminated waste (e.g., test strip water). Kitty litter is an affordable and accessible method of disposal. It can be thrown away in the garbage. While environmental impacts are unknown, it is assumed that drug waste in kitty litter would be a minimal amount.

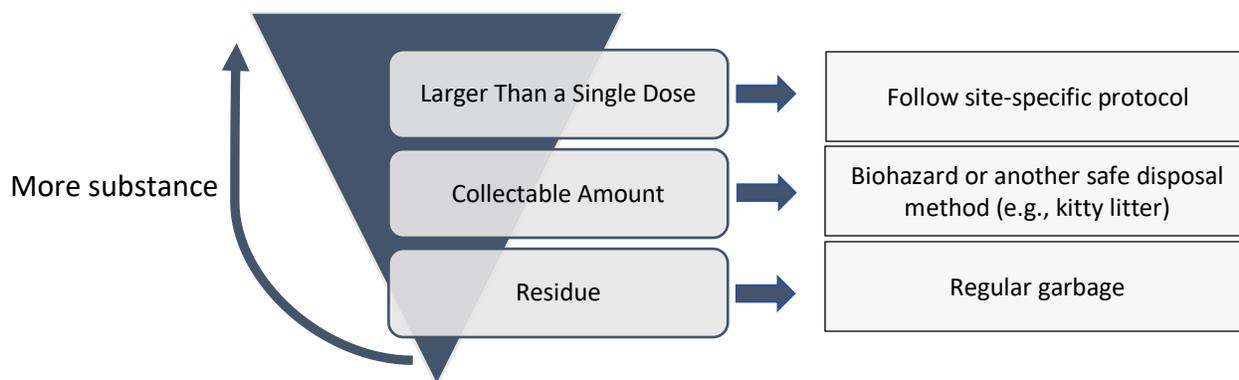
## Disposal of Drugs

If the service user wishes the drug checking technician to dispose of their sample, the technician should comply immediately and in front of the service user. If the service user wishes to dispose of their substance independently (i.e., at a later time), technicians should provide adequate instructions to the service user.

Do not dispose of drugs in the garbage, as it increases the risk of theft, puts others at risk, and is potentially environmentally harmful. Avoid disposing of drugs in a sink, or by flushing down the toilet as there may be harmful impacts on the environment. If possible, dispose of drugs in a biohazard bin that will be incinerated. If biohazard is not an option, kitty litter can act to deactivate drugs (mix drug with water and dump into a container of kitty litter). The kitty litter waste can be disposed of in the regular garbage.

For amounts of drugs that are larger than a single dose, sites have specific protocols in place for their disposal. This may include storage in a safe for destruction by police agencies. Following these protocols ensures that OPS or SCS exemptions are not jeopardized, so it is important to be familiar with site-specific protocols ahead of time.

Diagram of recommended disposal methods



## Terms

**Medicine cup:** a small paper or plastic cup approximately one ounce in volume. Similar to fast food ketchup cups, disposed of after a single use to prevent cross-contamination.

**Site:** a physical location where drug checking services are occurring. Sites can be section 56-exempted supervised consumption sites (SCS) or provincially-exempted overdose prevention sites (OPS). Sites can also be approved pop-up events or music festivals.

**Task wipe:** Lint-free, soft paper tissue used for drying scientific equipment. For drug checking, task wipes (brand name KimWipes) are used to dry the alcohol residue after cleaning the spectrometer.