

BIN IT.

An update

Does every member of your dental team know which type of waste goes in which type of bag or container? Let **Lynn Woods**, health and safety adviser in the BDA's compliance team, refresh your knowledge.

Knowing what to do with the different types of waste created in your practice is something the whole dental team needs to bear in mind. The waste requirements for general dental practices are quite detailed, setting out specific ways to handle each category – from extracted teeth to out-of-date medicines and the colour-coded bags you must use for specific items.

Waste bags

The colour-coding for waste has been developed to ensure that it is sorted, stored, collected and, of course, ultimately disposed of in the correct way. The system is well known with yellow bags and containers indicating hazardous clinical waste that requires incineration. This includes syringes that are only partially discharged and contaminated with residual medicines, which must go in the yellow-lidded sharps receptacle.



Orange bags are used to indicate that the waste is suitable for alternative treatment processes at the waste disposal site, such as autoclaving, rather than incineration.

Black bags would be used for domestic type waste such as food packaging, non-recyclable paper, including paper towels and magazines and, for example, used plastic cups from the reception or waiting area.

The reason behind this is that if gypsum is disposed of at a normal landfill, it reduces to produce toxic hydrogen sulphide gas. However, your waste contractor will be aware of these rules and will be able to advise.

You may use an orange bag, but only (rarely) when the model is contaminated and poses a risk of infection.

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Extracted teeth

Patients may often ask for their extracted teeth, in which case you can give them to them. Although they are considered waste produced by the dental practice, where a patient has asked for it, the extracted tooth is not considered as such, since it has not been discarded. However, in these cases, the tooth should be cleaned or disinfected and the patient can be advised they can return it to the practice for disposal if they change their mind.

Where they are to be thrown away, non-amalgam filled teeth and spicules should be placed in the yellow-lidded sharps container, whereas any teeth containing amalgam should be placed in a white amalgam tooth pot.

Dental amalgam

Dental amalgam and mercury should all be placed in a white amalgam container. This includes spent and out-of-date capsules, excess mixed amalgam and the contents of your amalgam separators.

In relation to the amalgam separator, all practices should have one installed. These should be to an appropriate ISO standard and fitted so as to capture any amalgam contained in waste waters. This means that spittoon waste can then be discharged to the drain or foul sewer without the need for a trade effluent consent.

Gypsum-made study models

Waste gypsum-made study (or working) models must be segregated into appropriate containers and either recycled as gypsum or disposed of via a specifically-designed landfill.

Out of date medicines

Generally, pharmaceutical and medicinal wastes must not be placed in the domestic waste stream for disposal. Medicines that have passed their expiry date can – if they agree to take them – be returned to your local pharmacy, but the same legal requirements apply as transferring them to a waste contractor. You must discharge the duty of care and, in particular, you must use waste documentation and keep appropriate records.

Alcohol hand gel containers

Alcohol hand gels which do not contain siloxanes and whose safety data sheet (SDS) does not prohibit discharge to the sewer, may be rinsed out and the packaging recycled. If you do not rinse them, they should be treated as though they contained the product and treated accordingly.

Your waste management contractor will advise on the safe disposal requirements for those materials that contain siloxanes. It has been known to cause significant damage to the environment and equipment used in the sewage treatment process.

Waste transfer and waste consignment notes

Record keeping is vital. Waste transfer notes are to be used for non-hazardous wastes and need to be kept for at least two years, whereas waste consignment notes are to be used for hazardous wastes (called 'special wastes' in Scotland) and these need to be kept for at least three years.

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