

Regulated Medical Waste (RMW) is defined by OSHA as any waste containing blood or other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) capable of transmitting pathogens and causing harm to human health or the environment. Red bags are used for RMW to provide a visual warning indicating the material must be handled with increased precaution due to the potential risk of exposure.



The Mystery of Red Bag Waste

Determining the Proper Waste Stream

The generator of the RMW must assess the perceived risk of the material being generated and applicable waste profiles.

Proper management of Regulated Medical Waste (RMW) is essential to ensure safety, compliance, and environmental sustainability. Here's how you can make informed decisions and improve waste segregation practices:

- Every user must assess the potential harm of the waste they generate. This involves evaluating whether the material has been in contact with bloodborne pathogens (BBP), recombinant DNA, biological toxins, or OPIMs
- Periodic discussions and reviews of existing and new waste profiles help reinforce knowledge and improve segregation practices.
- Identify materials that can be recycled, composted, or safely disposed of in regular waste streams, reducing the reliance on red bags for RMW.

Materials that Should be in a Red Bag

Visibly Contaminated PPE: PPE visibly contaminated with blood or OPIM

Blood-Saturated Materials: Gauzes, bandages, or surgical pads saturated with blood

Contaminated Solid Items: Blood-soaked or visibly contaminated personal protective equipment (PPE), Culture dishes and tissue culture (TC) flasks, Vacuum filtration units

Unfixed Human or Animal Tissue: Human or animal tissue that has not been fixed with preservatives. For more information on disposal for fixed tissues, refer to our RMW management plan

Small Containerized Volumes: Blood or infectious cultures below 50mL for larger volumes of liquid waste, inactivate with bleach then drain dispose. **Note: Parasites such as Toxoplasma must not be drain disposed.**



Bio-Hazard Symbol

Fun FAQ!

Many items currently contributing the bulk of RMW aggregate in the U.S. often do not meet the definition of RMW, are non-hazardous, can be recycled, composted or placed in a regular waste container.

Materials that Should NOT be in a Red Bag

Sharps: Pasteur pipettes, micropipettes, glass, needles, syringes, razors

Uncontaminated Materials: Paper, plastic, cardboard, Styrofoam, PPE

Non-Biological Chemical Waste: Medication or pharmaceutical waste, hazardous chemical waste

Non-Biological Radioactive Waste: Chemotherapy-related waste, materials contaminated with radioactive substances

Have more questions? Reach out to EH&S at Labsafety@columbia.edu or give us a call

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QR Code: Columbia University RMW Management Plan.

