

Guidelines for destruction of controlled substances and cannabis

Health Canada no longer requires pre-authorization requests for local destruction of controlled substances. This means pharmacists may proceed with destruction without notifying or receiving acknowledgment from Health Canada in advance.

As with all controlled substances, measures must be taken to ensure security and minimize the risk of diversion. Destruction should occur on an ongoing regular basis, at least every three months, as well as any time when a significant accumulation has occurred. The goal of local destruction is to alter or denature the narcotics, controlled drugs, or targeted substances to such an extent that consumption is rendered impossible or improbable. It is the responsibility of the person destroying the substances to ensure that this requirement is met. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should be aware that the destruction process may vary from substance to substance depending on the chemical or physical properties of the substance in question, however a change of state is recommended (i.e., from solid to liquid)¹.

Pharmacists and persons in charge of hospitals who do not wish to destroy controlled substances on site may, through an exemption under section 56 of the *Controlled Substances and Drugs Act (CDSA)*, sell or provide these substances, to a licensed dealer who is licensed to destroy narcotics or controlled drugs.

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can seek more specific direction on destruction from the two published Health Canada guidance documents. These documents interpret relevant legislation and provide procedures on handling and destruction of unserviceable stock and post-consumer returns.

Unserviceable stock

Health Canada's [guidance document](#) states that unserviceable stock is a drug product containing a narcotic, controlled drug, or targeted substance that is unusable, expired, and/or that cannot be dispensed².

Post-consumer returns

Health Canada's [guidance document](#) states that post-consumer returns are unused or expired drug substances or drug products that may contain a controlled substance and that are returned by an individual consumer³.

Since April 2018, pharmacists are no longer required to record the drug name, strength, and quantity of post-consumer returns or to separate controlled drugs from other prescription or non-prescription products. As a result, all post-consumer returns should be treated as controlled substances.

¹Guidance Document for Pharmacists, Practitioners and Persons in Charge of Hospitals: Handling and Destruction of Unserviceable Stock Containing Narcotics, Controlled Drugs or Targeted Substances, s 3.1.1

²Guidance Document for Pharmacists, Practitioners and Persons in Charge of Hospitals: Handling and Destruction of Unserviceable Stock Containing Narcotics, Controlled Drugs or Targeted Substances, s 1.0

³Guidance Document for Pharmacists and Dealers Licensed to Destroy Narcotics, Controlled Drugs or Targeted Substances: Handling and Destruction of Post-consumer Returns Containing Narcotics, Controlled Drugs or Targeted Substances, s 1.0

Loss or theft of unserviceable stock or post-consumer returns

As with any controlled substance, loss or theft of unserviceable stock or post-consumer returns must be reported to Health Canada and should be reported to local law enforcement⁴. Additional guidance from Health Canada on this topic is available [here](#).

The form to report lost or stolen drugs can be found [here](#).

Cannabis

Rules related to handling and destruction of unserviceable stock and post-consumer returns for controlled substances that exist by virtue of the section 56 exemption under the CDSA, have been transitioned to section 140 of the *Cannabis Act* and apply to legally-obtained cannabis⁵. Therefore, pharmacists may accept post-consumer returns for cannabis, regardless of whether the product was obtained for recreational or medical use. However, pharmacists must not possess or accept returns for cannabis that they know was acquired illegally⁶.

There is no restriction on the quantity of cannabis pharmacists may possess for the purpose of destruction but, given the risk of diversion, it must be stored securely, and it is recommended that it not be allowed to accumulate. Any theft of post-consumer return cannabis must be reported to Health Canada within 10 days and should be reported to law enforcement⁷.

Disclaimer: This document is intended to provide advice to the profession and information for the public. In the case of any conflict or omission, the Standards of Practice, ACP Code of Ethics, and requirements in legislation prevail over this document.

⁴Narcotic Control Regulations, s 42; Food and Drug Regulations, s G.03.013; *Cannabis Act*, s 176 and s342

⁵[Health products containing cannabis or for use with cannabis: Guidance for the Cannabis Act, the Food and Drugs Act, and related regulations](#), s 6.5

⁶Cannabis Regulations, s 159; Narcotic Control Regulations, s 56(1)

⁷*Cannabis Act*, s 176