

USP <800> Wipe Sampling: Why It Matters—and How to Implement It Without Fear

For many sterile compounding teams, hazardous drug (HD) wipe sampling is one of the most intimidating aspects of USP <800>. Even organizations with strong sterile compounding programs often delay implementation—not because they don't care about safety, but because they're unsure what wipe sampling will uncover, how results will be interpreted, or how regulators will respond. That hesitation is understandable. But avoiding wipe sampling doesn't reduce risk, it just leaves it unmeasured. USP <800> wipe sampling isn't designed to "catch" failures. It exists to confirm whether your hazardous drug controls are doing what they're supposed to do: containing HD residues to controlled areas. When approached thoughtfully, wipe sampling becomes a tool for confidence, not fear.



What HD wipe sampling is really about

At its core, HD wipe sampling answers a very specific question: Are HD residues being effectively removed from surfaces? As much as we try to contain these residues, they are going to migrate, we know that. So, can we at least say that in places where we expect to find them that they are being removed.

HD wipe sampling evaluates whether:

- decontamination agents are appropriate for the drugs being handled.
- decontamination steps are effective.
- processes are consistently applied.
- residual HD contamination is being controlled over time.

In other words, wipe sampling measures system performance.

Why sterile compounders are hesitant to start

Across the industry, we hear the same concerns:

- “What if we find contamination everywhere?”
- “What if results trigger regulatory scrutiny?”
- “What if we don’t know how to respond?”
- “What if staff feel blamed or unsafe?”

These concerns don’t mean a program is weak—they mean leadership understands the weight of occupational safety. The key is recognizing that not knowing doesn’t equal safety. Wipe sampling provides data that allows teams to improve controls before exposure becomes a real problem.

USP <800> expects progress, not perfection

USP <800> does not require zero detectable residue. It encourages assessment, awareness, control, and continuous improvement. Inspectors and surveyors are not expecting organizations to discover nothing. They are looking for evidence that you:

- are considering exposure risk.
- understand your results.
- respond appropriately.
- adjust processes when needed.

Starting HD wipe sampling—and managing it responsibly—is often viewed more favorably than avoiding it altogether.

How to implement wipe sampling in a way that makes sense

- Start with intent, not fear - Before collecting a single wipe sample, leadership should align on *why* sampling is being done:
 - To verify current decontamination processes
 - To protect staff
 - To identify trends
- Be deliberate about where you sample - You do not need to sample every surface. Meaningful wipe sampling focuses on:
 - High-touch areas near HD workflows
 - Patient care areas
 - Unsuspecting area where staff may be exposed (check out desk)
- Expect results and plan your response in advance - One of the biggest mistakes organizations make is collecting data before deciding how they’ll respond to it. To prevent overreaction and build confidence when results arrive, before sampling begins, define:
 - Who reviews results (pharmacy, environmental health and safety)
 - How trends will be evaluated

- What triggers investigation
- What actions are reasonable and proportional
- Focus on trends, not single data points - A single wipe result rarely tells the full story. Trend-based evaluation turns wipe sampling into a management tool—not a compliance threat. Trended data answers better questions:
 - Are results improving over time?
 - Do certain areas consistently show higher residue?
 - Do changes in decontaminating agents or workflows impact results?
- Communicate openly with staff - Transparency builds trust. Share:
 - Why sampling is being done
 - What results mean (and don't mean)
 - What changes are being made as a result

We hope this blog takes you from fear to confidence. HD wipe sampling under USP <800> isn't about uncovering failure. It's about confirming control. When implemented thoughtfully, it protects staff, strengthens HD operations, and demonstrates regulatory maturity.