

Evaluation of Safety Scalpels (12/04) **UPDATED** (12/07)

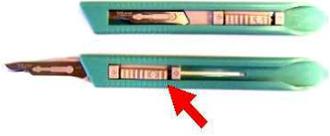
Question: I recently saw an advertisement for a safety scalpel. Has DECS evaluated any safety scalpels and if so, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using them compared to a reusable scalpel handle with disposable blades?

Answer: DECS completed an evaluation of the Lark Retractable Safety Scalpel (now known as the Futura™ Safety Scalpel) several years ago and recently evaluated the Miltex Disposable Safety Scalpel. Scalpel blades are a type of sharp that have been implicated in percutaneous injuries. With a conventional scalpel, injuries can occur when passing the scalpel between dental health-care personnel (DHCP); when removing the contaminated blade from the handle before disposal; and when the blade is left uncovered on the instrument tray. Both of the disposable safety scalpels evaluated by DECS are designed to protect DHCP from surgical blade injuries. These safety scalpels have a fully retractable blade designed to protect DHCP from accidental percutaneous injuries associated with conventional sterilizable scalpel handles and disposable blades. The operator can easily extend or retract the blade using one hand. Because the blade can be retracted during periods of non-use or during instrument passing, they are potentially safer. Also, the blade does not have to be removed from the handle before disposal. These features can minimize the potential for percutaneous injury and create a safer environment for DHCP. [Table 1](#) provides general information about the Futura™ Safety Scalpel and the Miltex Disposable Safety Scalpel.

While it is not presently mandatory to use safety scalpels, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires annual consideration and implementation of appropriate commercially available and effective safer medical devices designed to eliminate or minimize occupational exposure. Both the Miltex and Futura™ safety scalpels were found to be safe for clinical use during our limited evaluations, and are examples of devices that could be evaluated in USAF dental clinics to fulfill the OSHA safety device evaluation requirement. It's also important to consider that when presented with a device that has a significantly different design than a traditional device, decisions regarding preference and future use can be dependent upon the individual practitioner's style and technique. There are several other safety scalpels available with engineering controls, and dental clinics are not just limited to evaluating the two safety scalpels that DECS has evaluated.

[Click Here for Table 1](#)

Table 1. Summary of Safety Scalpels Evaluated by DECS

	Futura™ Safety Scalpel¹	Miltex Disposable Safety Scalpel
Manufacturer	Merit Medical Systems 1600 West Merit Parkway South Jordan, UT 84095 (800) 356-3748 (801) 253-1600 (801) 253-1652 FAX www.merit.com	Miltex, Inc. 589 Davies Dr. York, PA 17402 (800) 645-8000 (717) 840-9355 (717) 840-9347 FAX www.miltex.com
Price	Suggested Retail Price: Box of 50 blades \$75.00 Government Price: Box of 50 blades \$50.00	Suggested Retail Price ² : Box of 10 blades \$24.72 Government Price ² : Box of 10 blades \$11.65
Available Blade Sizes	#s 10, 11, 15	#s 10, 11, 15
Summary of Safety Feature	Spring-based slider that automatically retracts the blade into the device body when pressed with audible confirmation 	To retract the blade, the user pushes the slider to the right and back until the blade locks into place 
Advantages³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Potentially safer because it may minimize risk for percutaneous injuries + Potentially safer for patients and staff because blade can remain retracted until needed + Minimal user intervention required to activate safety feature + Conveniently packaged + Lightweight and well balanced + Safety feature is easy to recognize and use + Provides audible confirmation of blade lock + Safety feature can be activated with one hand + Enhances infection control because of its disposability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Potentially safer because it may minimize risk for percutaneous injuries + Potentially safer for patients and staff because blade can remain retracted until needed + Conveniently packaged + Lightweight and well balanced + Safety feature is easy to recognize and use + Safety feature can be activated with one hand + Enhances infection control and safety because of its disposability
Disadvantages³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Handle is thicker than traditional scalpel handle; may make handling cumbersome - Potential exists for blade to be inadvertently retracted when making incisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blade/handle connection more flexible than a conventional device making the device feel unstable during use - Handle is thicker than traditional scalpel handle; may make handling cumbersome - Potential exists for blade to be inadvertently retracted when making incisions

¹ At the time of the DECS evaluation in 2001, the device was known as the Lark Retractable Safety Scalpel and in 2004 the manufacturer was Hypoguard USA, Inc. The current manufacturer and pricing information as of 12/07 is listed in the table.

² Available for purchase through American Medical Depot at (305) 364-0888

³ Information compiled from limited DECS clinical evaluations.