



Managing Sorbents: Towels, Wipes, and Rags

Many businesses and government agencies use towels, wipes, rags, swabs, or similar launderable or disposable materials, collectively referred to as *sorbents*. Used sorbents may become hazardous wastes if they are dampened with solvents or cleaners, or if they collect contaminants during use. This fact sheet provides guidance from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to businesses and other hazardous waste generators to properly manage their used sorbents.

The Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (MnTAP) may be able to help you reduce the toxicity of the solvents or cleaners you use and reduce your hazardous waste risks and costs.

Are my used sorbents hazardous waste?

If you use sorbents with a solvent or cleaner, or to clean items that could transfer toxic contaminants such as lead or chromium to the sorbent, you must assume your used sorbents are hazardous wastes unless you test or otherwise show they are not hazardous. The process to demonstrate that your sorbents are not hazardous is called evaluation. See MPCA fact sheet [Evaluate Waste](#) for detailed guidance on evaluation.

How do I manage my hazardous waste sorbents?

You may either launder and reuse or dispose of your hazardous waste sorbents. Table 1 on the next page presents common management options for hazardous waste sorbents in Minnesota.

Many of the management options require that the sorbents contain no *free liquids* when they leave your site. This condition is also known as being 'RCRA-dry'. Assume that your sorbents contain free liquids unless you:

- Mechanically or manually compress them with a pressure of at least ten pounds per square inch (10 psi) until no further liquid is released. This is slightly less than a hard hand squeeze by an average person.
- Centrifuge them with a force of at least 100 times normal gravity until no further liquid is released. This is slightly less than the fast spin cycle on a common home or commercial washing machine.
- Show that your sorbents already do not contain free liquids after use or through another method. For example, a sorbent used with a minimal amount of a highly volatile solvent such as ethyl acetate or acetone often already contains no free liquids after normal use. **Do not air-dry hazardous waste solvents.**

Collect liquids removed from your sorbents and manage the recovered liquids as hazardous waste.

***Caution: Sorbents contaminated with a wide variety of solvents may present a fire risk or spontaneously combust regardless of whether all free liquids have been removed or not. Always handle contaminated sorbents in accordance with the Minnesota State Fire Code and the directions of your local fire marshal.**

Sorbents that are contaminated with:	If the sorbents will be laundered, first remove all free liquid before they leave your site, then:	If the sorbents will be disposed:
<p>'Ignitable-only' solvents; including only D001 and F003.</p> <p>For an explanation of D001 solvents, see MPCA factsheet Characteristic Wastes.</p> <p>For an explanation of F003 solvents, see MPCA factsheet F-List of Hazardous Waste.</p>	<p>Non-hazardous after they contain no free liquid. *</p> <p>Non-hazardous sorbents may be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial laundry. *</p> <p>Count only the recovered liquids towards your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Non-hazardous after they contain no free liquid. *</p> <p>If you remove free liquids prior to disposal, count only the recovered liquid towards your hazardous waste generator size. You may dispose of the now non-hazardous sorbents as solid waste. *</p> <p>If you do not remove free liquids prior to disposal, dispose of these sorbents as fully regulated hazardous waste and count the full weight towards your generator size.</p>
<p>Toxic solvents: including F-listed solvents F001, F002, F004, and F005; and Toxicity Characteristic solvents such as methyl ethyl ketone (MEK), trichloroethylene (TCE), and perchloroethylene.</p> <p>For an explanation of these F-listed solvents, see MPCA factsheet F-List of Hazardous Waste.</p> <p>For an explanation of Toxicity Characteristic solvents, see MPCA factsheet Characteristic Wastes.</p>	<p>These sorbents remain hazardous wastes.</p> <p>May be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial laundry. *</p> <p>If laundering on-site, ensure that the sewage treatment plant that your site discharges to will accept laundry wastewater containing toxic solvents.</p> <p>Count both the sorbents and any recovered liquids towards your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Dispose of these sorbents as fully regulated hazardous waste whether free liquid is removed or not.</p> <p>Count both the sorbents and any recovered liquids towards your hazardous waste generator size.</p>
<p>Any other hazardous waste or hazardous waste spill cleanup debris, including Toxicity Characteristic metals, such as cadmium, chromium, and lead; or crude oil.</p> <p>For an explanation of Toxicity Characteristic metals, see MPCA factsheet Characteristic Wastes.</p>	<p>These sorbents remain hazardous wastes.</p> <p>May be laundered on-site. * If transported to a commercial laundry, a hazardous waste manifest must be used.</p> <p>If laundering on-site, ensure that the sewage treatment plant that your site discharges to will accept laundry wastewater containing the toxic contaminants.</p> <p>Count both the sorbents and any recovered liquids towards your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Dispose of these sorbents as fully regulated hazardous waste whether free liquid is removed or not.</p> <p>Count both the sorbents and any recovered liquids towards your hazardous waste generator size.</p>
<p>Used oil, such as crankcase lubricant, hydraulic fluid, and thermal oil</p>	<p>Manage as a used oil-related waste. See MPCA factsheet Used Oil and Related Wastes.</p>	
<p>Refined fuels</p>	<p>Manage as a fuel-related waste. See MPCA factsheet Fuel-Related Wastes.</p>	

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