

Managing sorbents: towels, wipes, and rags

Towels, wipes, rags, swabs, spill socks, floor dry, and similar launderable or disposable materials are collectively referred to as *sorbents*. Used sorbents may become hazardous wastes if they are dampened with solvents or cleaners that would themselves be hazardous wastes when disposed or if the sorbents collect hazardous waste contaminants during use.

In Minnesota, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the metropolitan counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington (Metro Counties) regulate the management of hazardous waste sorbents generated by businesses and other entities.

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. See [More information](#) on page 3.

Are my used sorbents hazardous waste?

If you use sorbents with a solvent or cleaner, or for cleaning 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 that they are not hazardous. The process to demonstrate that your sorbents are not hazardous is called evaluation. For detailed guidance on evaluation, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-01, Evaluate Waste, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-01.pdf>.

How do I manage my hazardous waste sorbents?

You may either launder and reuse or dispose of your hazardous waste sorbents. Because Minnesota already allowed laundering and reuse of some sorbents and solid waste disposal of others, the MPCA and Metro Counties have not adopted the 2013 Federal Final 'Rags' Rule.

Find [management options for hazardous waste sorbents in Minnesota](#) in the table on page 2.

Most 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 10 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 home or commercial washing machine.
- Show that your sorbents already do not contain free liquids after use. For example, a sorbent used with a minimal amount of a highly volatile solvent, such as ethyl acetate or acetone, often contains no free liquids after normal use. **Do not air-dry hazardous waste sorbents.**

Exception: You may assume that prepackaged disinfectant wipes that are pre-moistened only with an alcohol or povidone/iodine solution may be assumed to be RCRA-dry and non-hazardous after use if you did not add any liquid to the wipe. You may find more information regarding this allowance in the 'Prepackaged disinfectant wipes' section in MPCA fact sheet #w-hw3-35, Regulatory consensus on health care waste issues, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw3-35.pdf>.

*Caution: Sorbents used with some products may present a fire risk or spontaneously combust even if all free liquids have been removed. **Always handle sorbents dampened with liquids that are flammable or combustible in accordance with the Minnesota State Fire Code and the directions of your local fire marshal in addition to any applicable hazardous waste standards.**

Management options for hazardous waste sorbents in Minnesota (continued on page 3)

Sorbents that are contaminated with:	On-site accumulation:	Laundering or disposal:
<p>'Ignitable-only' solvents: including only D001 and F003.</p> <p>For an explanation of D001 solvents and spontaneous combustion of sorbents, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-04, Characteristic Wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-04.pdf</p> <p>For an explanation of F003 solvents, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-00, F-List of Hazardous Waste, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-00.pdf</p>	<p>If you remove all free liquids, then:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sorbents that will not spontaneously combust are non-hazardous after they contain no free liquids. No hazardous waste accumulation requirements apply. ● Sorbents that may spontaneously combust after free liquids are removed are solid ignitable hazardous wastes. <p>Accumulate solid ignitable hazardous waste sorbents, and sorbents from which free liquids have not been removed, in compatible containers labeled with the words 'Hazardous Waste' and a clear description of the waste. These containers may be closed with just gravity-held lids as long as no visible liquids (such as puddles or pools) are present in the container.</p> <p>Accumulate removed free liquids, and containers with any visible liquids present, as fully regulated hazardous waste in closed, compatible containers labeled with the words 'Hazardous Waste' and a clear description of the waste. These containers must be liquid-tight when closed, even if overturned.</p>	<p>Laundering or disposal:</p> <p>Laundering: Any sorbents may be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial laundry. Keep records of each shipment to an off-site laundry.</p> <p>Disposal: These sorbents, if they will not spontaneously combust, are non-hazardous after they contain no free liquids. The MPCA encourages laundering and reuse when possible, however you may dispose of non-hazardous sorbents in your normal solid waste.</p> <p>Sorbents that may spontaneously combust must be disposed as fully regulated hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed, if the sorbents are not laundered.</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 F-Listed solvents, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-00, F-List of Hazardous Waste, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-00.pdf</p> <p>For an explanation of Toxicity Characteristic solvents, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-04, Characteristic Wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-04.pdf</p> <p>Any other hazardous waste or hazardous spill debris: including Toxicity Characteristic metals, such as cadmium, chromium, or lead.</p> <p>For an explanation of Toxicity Characteristic metals, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw2-04, Characteristic Wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw2-04.pdf</p>	<p>These sorbents remain fully regulated hazardous wastes even if all free liquids are removed.</p> <p>You may accumulate these sorbents in compatible containers labeled with the words 'Hazardous Waste' and a clear description of the waste. These containers may be closed with just gravity-held lids as long as no visible liquids (such as puddles or pools) are present in the container.</p> <p>Accumulate removed free liquids, and any containers with any free liquids present, as fully regulated hazardous waste in closed, compatible containers labeled with the words 'Hazardous Waste' and a clear description of the waste. These containers must be liquid-tight when closed, even if overturned.</p>	<p>These sorbents remain fully regulated hazardous wastes even if all free liquids are removed.</p> <p>Laundering: Any sorbents may be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial laundry. Keep records of each shipment to an off-site laundry.</p> <p>If laundered on-site, ensure that the sewage treatment plant that your site discharges to will accept laundry wastewater containing the toxic contaminants.</p> <p>Disposal: These sorbents must be disposed as fully regulated hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed, if the sorbents are not laundered.</p>
	<p>For more information on accumulation of fully regulated hazardous wastes, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-05, Accumulate hazardous waste, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-05.pdf</p>	<p>For more information on hazardous waste disposal, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-06, Treat or Dispose of Hazardous Waste, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-06.pdf</p>

Management options for hazardous waste sorbents in Minnesota (continued from page 2)

Sorbents that are contaminated with:	On-site accumulation:	Laundering or disposal:
Used oil , such as motor oil, machine lubricant, hydraulic fluid, or thermal oil	Manage at all times as a used oil-related waste. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-30, Used Oil and Related Wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-30.pdf	
Refined fuels , such as gasoline, diesel, ethanol, or fuel oil	Manage at all times as a fuel-related waste. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-19, Fuel-related Wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-19.pdf	
Crude oil , including unrefined petroleum	Manage under one of the options discussed in MPCA fact sheet #w-hw4-11, Crude oil and unrefined petroleum wastes, at https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw4-11.pdf	

Counting and reporting

Count all recovered liquid hazardous wastes and all hazardous waste sorbents shipped off-site for disposal towards your site’s generator size and report these wastes to the MPCA or your Metro County.

Do not count laundered sorbents towards your site’s generator size. Also do not count sorbents contaminated only with ‘ignitable-only’ solvents from which all free liquids have been removed before disposal towards your site’s generator size. Do not report these wastes to the MPCA, however some Metro Counties may still require reporting of these wastes.

For more information regarding counting hazardous wastes and determining your site’s generator size, see MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-02, Determine generator size, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-02.pdf>

More information

Guidance and requirements in this fact sheet were compiled from Minnesota Rules, Chapter 7045, and incorporate regulatory interpretation decisions made by the MPCA on April 12, 2011; October 9, 2013; November 11, 2013; April 12, 2017; and January 11, 2023. To review Minnesota Statutes and Rules, visit the Office of the Revisor of Statutes at <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/pubs>.

Contact your Metro County or the MPCA with your questions. The MPCA’s Small Business Environmental Assistance Program can also provide free, confidential regulatory compliance assistance. MnTAP can help you reduce your waste generation and risk. Report all hazardous waste incidents such as spills to the Minnesota Duty Officer immediately.

Metro County Hazardous Waste Offices

- Anoka 763-324-4260
..... <https://www.anokacounty.us/>
- Carver 952-361-1800
..... <http://www.co.carver.mn.us/>
- Dakota 952-891-7557
..... <https://www.co.dakota.mn.us/>
- Hennepin 612-348-3777
..... <http://www.hennepin.us/>
- Ramsey 651-266-1199
..... <https://www.ramseycounty.us/>
- Scott 952-496-8177
..... <http://www.scottcountymn.gov/>
- Washington 651-430-6655
..... <https://www.co.washington.mn.us/>

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

- Toll free (all offices) 800-657-3864
- All offices 651-296-6300
..... <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota Duty Officer

- Toll free 800-422-0798
- Metro 651-649-5451

Small Business Environmental Assistance Program

- Toll free 800-657-3938
- Metro 651-282-6143
..... smallbizhelp.pca@state.mn.us

Minnesota Technical Assistance Program

- Toll free 800-247-0015
- Metro 612-624-1300
..... <http://www.mntap.umn.edu>