



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 or collect contaminants during use. This fact sheet provides guidance from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to businesses and other hazardous waste generators on how to properly manage their used sorbents.

Generators located in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area counties of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington (Metro Counties) may be subject to more strict local requirements of their Metro County. Contact your Metro County; see more information on page 3.

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 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 actually not hazardous is called evaluation. See MPCA fact sheet #w-hw1-01, Evaluate Waste, at <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/w-hw1-01.pdf> 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. Because Minnesota already allowed laundering and reuse of some sorbents and solid waste disposal of others, the MPCA and Metro Counties did not adopt the 2013 Federal Final 'Rags' Rule and at this time do not intend to.

[Table 1](#) on the next page presents common management options for hazardous waste sorbents in Minnesota.

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.**

Collect recovered liquids and manage them as hazardous waste.

*Caution: Sorbents used with some products may present a fire risk or spontaneously combust even if all free liquids have been removed.

Always handle contaminated sorbents in accordance with the Minnesota State Fire Code and the directions of your local fire marshal in addition to hazardous waste standards.

Table 1. Management options in Minnesota for hazardous waste sorbents

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 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>Sorbents that will not potentially spontaneously combust are non-hazardous after they contain no free liquid.</p> <p>Sorbents that may spontaneously combust are regulated as solid ignitable hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed.</p> <p>Both may be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial laundry.</p> <p>Count solid ignitable hazardous waste sorbents and recovered liquids toward your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Sorbents that will not potentially spontaneously combust are non-hazardous after they contain no free liquid. You may dispose of non-hazardous sorbents in your normal solid waste.</p> <p>Sorbents that may spontaneously combust must be disposed as solid ignitable hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed.</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> <p>Count solid ignitable hazardous waste sorbents, recovered liquids, and sorbents with free liquids toward your hazardous waste 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 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>These sorbents remain hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed.</p> <p>They may be laundered on-site or transported without a hazardous waste manifest to a commercial 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 solvents.</p> <p>Count sorbents and recovered liquids, excluding laundry wastewater, toward your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Sorbents are fully regulated hazardous waste whether or not free liquid is removed.</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> <p>Count sorbents and recovered liquids toward your hazardous waste generator size.</p>
<p>Any other hazardous waste or hazardous waste spill cleanup debris: including crude oil or Toxicity Characteristic metals, such as cadmium, chromium, or lead</p> <p>For more information on crude oil wastes, see 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</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 hazardous wastes even if free liquids are removed.</p> <p>May be laundered on-site. If transported to a commercial laundry, a hazardous waste manifest must be used.</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>Count sorbents and recovered liquids, excluding laundry wastewater, toward your hazardous waste generator size.</p>	<p>Sorbents are fully regulated hazardous waste whether or not free liquid is removed.</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> <p>Count sorbents and recovered liquids toward your hazardous waste generator size.</p>

(Table 1 continued on page 3)

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

Table 1. Management options in Minnesota for hazardous waste sorbents (continued from page 2)

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:
Used oil, such as motor oil, machine lubricant, hydraulic fluid, or thermal oil	Manage 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	Manage 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	

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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; and April 12, 2017. 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. The Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (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 763-422-7093
<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) 1-800-657-3864
 All offices 651-296-6300
<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/>

Minnesota Duty Officer

Toll free 1-800-422-0798
 Metro 651-649-5451

Small Business Environmental Assistance Program

Toll free 1-800-657-3938
 Metro 651-282-6143
<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sbeap/>

Minnesota Technical Assistance Program

Toll free 1-800-247-0015
 Metro 612-624-1300
<http://www.mntap.umn.edu>