



The National Park Service EnviroFact Sheet

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Managing Waste Sorbents and Wipes (SW-10)

DRAFT

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Sorbents and wipes include cloth towels, paper wipes, pads, sorbent booms and floor sweeps, and other absorbent materials often used to absorb solvents, paints, inks or oils. Typical sorbents found in parks include rags used to remove solvent during cleaning and for painting operations, absorbent pads used to collect drips during fueling, and sorbent booms used to cleanup fuel spills.

Contaminated sorbents may be hazardous waste. However, they are commonly overlooked and improperly disposed of in the general trash without any consideration for their potential to be hazardous. Therefore, it is important for park staff to actively manage waste sorbents and wipes.

Determining if a contaminated wipe is hazardous waste can be difficult. You must consider:

- The type of chemical used;
- The amount of residual chemical left in the used wipe;
- The type of process that generated the contaminated wipe; and
- How the wipe is ultimately handled (i.e., will it be re-used, recycled, laundered or simply discarded).

If you generate wipes that are heavily soiled with a hazardous material, your wipes are likely to be hazardous waste and would need to be managed and disposed of as such.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

There are no federal regulations specific to contaminated sorbents and wipes. However, because sorbents and wipes (e.g., rags) can become hazardous waste when used to absorb hazardous contaminants, special handling is often required. Hazardous waste is subject to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and must be managed under 40 CFR 260-262 (see the EnviroFact Sheets - "Identifying Hazardous Waste (HW-2)" and "Generator Requirements (HW-1)").



State regulations applicable to hazardous waste, which could be applied to waste sorbents and wipes, may be more stringent and should be reviewed.

HANDLING AND STORAGE

Sorbents and wipes contaminated with hazardous substances are not subject to hazardous waste management requirements until they are no longer useable. Therefore, sorbents and wipes contaminated with hazardous substances can be collected and reused. However, most states require that there be **no free liquids** present in rags that are being accumulated for reuse. Soiled but reusable rags should be collected and maintained in a labeled, closed container. Any free liquids must be managed as hazardous waste. Alternately, the entire sobent/solvent mixture can be managed as a hazardous waste. If a park fails to follow this "no free liquids" requirement, it may be subject to full regulation, including possible citation for failure to properly identify and manage hazardous wastes.

Allowing solvents to evaporate from the rags in order to achieve a "no free liquids" state is considered "treatment" of a hazardous waste without a permit and is not allowed. This does not mean that it is unacceptable to use a rag until it is dry. Parks may wish to use some sort of solvent extraction device to recover excess solvent if they plan to have rags laundered.

Waste sorbents and wipes should be collected in proper containers that are kept closed, labeled, and dated. The material should be inspected weekly, managed under satellite accumulation requirements, and sent to a proper facility for disposal.

DISPOSAL

Before disposal, it is generally required that the generator wring all free liquids from the sorbent, then reuse or manage the extracted liquid according to the appropriate hazardous waste regulations. After extracting the free liquid or after being used until dry, disposal depends on the contaminant absorbed by the sorbent. If it was contaminated with:

- An ignitable solvent only - manage as a **solid waste** (i.e., throw in the trash);
- A "listed" or "characteristic" hazardous waste (other than ignitable waste) - manage as a **hazardous waste**; or
- Used oil or grease only - manage as **solid waste**. Send one-time use sorbents to an incinerator permitted to burn oil-contaminated materials or test and manage accordingly. Send reusable sorbents, such as red rags to a commercial laundry for cleaning and reuse.

If you are unsure of the contaminant's characteristics, check its Material Safety Data Sheet to determine if it could be a "listed" or "characteristic" waste.

POLLUTION PREVENTION

Source Reduction

Sorbent and wipe materials are typically used in quantities that exceed the actual need. Park staff should use only the amount of sorbent or wipe material needed for each job. Also, improve housekeeping methods by using sorbents until they are no longer usable. Whenever possible, substitute hazardous solvents with non-hazardous solvents.



FOR MORE INFO...

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, "Managing Towels, Wipes and Sorbents":

<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/publications/w-hw4-61.pdf>

WASTE SORBENTS AND WIPES COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

Checklist Item	Notes
1. Ensure that a determination has been made regarding whether or not sorbents and wipes have been contaminated with a material that causes it to be a hazardous waste (contact your state department of environmental protection for guidance).	
2. Ensure that used sorbents and wipes are recycled or reused whenever feasible.	
3. Ensure that no free liquid is present in contaminated wipes, regardless of the method of disposal.	
4. Inspect solid waste receptacles to ensure that sorbents and wipes waste are not thrown away improperly.	
5. Ensure that the waste sorbents and wipes are not intentionally left to air-dry before being placed in waste receptacles.	
6. If waste sorbents are hazardous, ensure that they are placed in the proper container labeled with the words "Hazardous Waste" and the type of waste contained inside (e.g., solvent solids). The container should be kept closed at all times and be emptied on a regular schedule.	
7. If waste rags are sent to a commercial laundry, ensure that the laundry is aware of the type of solvent used on the rags.	
8. Ensure that sorbent oil boom waste is being managed in accordance with your state's "special waste" management requirements.	
9. Ensure that approved flammables containers are used for the collection of waste wipes and rags.	