

FACT SHEET



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Sandbag Disposal

(317) 232-8603 • (800) 451-6027

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100 N. Senate Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46204

Description:

- IDEM regulates solid waste. Used sandbags, with some exceptions, are considered solid waste.
- Sandbags are used by communities and private property owners to hold back flood waters and prevent property and structural damage.
- Sandbags can be made of burlap or plastic (polypropylene). Sand used in sandbags often includes granules of all different sizes, including coarse grains that can cause skin abrasions and fine grains that can be easily blown around by wind. The sandbags also can contain clay, which can stain clothing and surfaces.

Environmental Impacts:

- Improper management of sandbags following a flood emergency can lead to unwanted blowing of sand and litter from deteriorated sandbags.
- Sand that has been contaminated by petroleum products or hazardous chemicals has the potential to negatively impact public health and the environment, if improperly discarded.

IDEM's Role:

- IDEM regulates the disposal of used sandbags, if the sand has become contaminated by flood waters that can contain contaminants of many varieties.
- IDEM has a policy regarding uncontaminated soil, which would apply to unused sandbags. You may find information regarding this policy on the IDEM website at www.in.gov/idem/ctap/files/nrpd_waste-0064.pdf.
- Proper sandbag disposal varies based on what has come in contact with the sandbags.
- If sandbags have come in contact with industrial wastes, fuel, oil or other chemicals that could negatively impact the environment, they must be disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill.
- If sandbags have come in contact with manure, the sand from them may be land applied on agricultural land at an application rate that is consistent with the applicable state regulations and recorded in the farm's operating record. The empty bags must be disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill. Land application for a confined feeding operation permit holder is regulated by the confined feeding rules at 327 IAC 19. Other land application is regulated by the Office of the State Chemist under Title 355 of the Indiana Administrative Code.
- If sandbags have come in contact only with floodwater, they may be sent to a municipal solid waste landfill or they may be used under certain conditions and restrictions. The following are alternatives to disposal:
 - Sand from used sandbags that is uncontaminated per the uncontaminated soil policy may be used as substitute aggregate in construction applications.
 - Full sandbags, where the sand is not considered contaminated in accordance with the uncontaminated soil policy, may be used as general fill or for the construction of berms:
 - The sandbags must be covered with a minimum of six inches of soil and vegetative cover; and
 - The cover must be in place to keep bags from being exposed on the surface and prevent them from deteriorating and blowing or washing away.
- IDEM does not regulate the management of unused sandbags. The following are alternatives for unused sandbags:

- Unused sandbags can be saved for future use or disposed of in a landfill.
- Sand from unused sandbags may be used as a substitute aggregate in construction applications;
- Full, unused sandbags can be used as general fill or for the construction of berms. However, they must be covered with a minimum of six inches of soil and vegetation.
- Clean sand from sandbags may be used as a soil amendment in residential flower beds, for snow and ice control, or as a base for paving blocks or sidewalks.

Citizen's Role:

- There are a number of safety guidelines every citizen should follow to ensure proper sandbag disposal and reuse, including:
 - Used sandbags can be extremely heavy and should be handled with care. If a person does not know whether the sandbag has come into contact with contaminants, it is better to be safe and dispose of it in a landfill.
 - Wear appropriate personal protective equipment when handling sandbags such as gloves, boots, safety glasses or goggles, to protect eyes, hands and feet from abrasions and possible contaminants;
 - Never use the sand from sandbags to fill children's sandboxes or playgrounds;
 - Never dispose of sand in a wetland, flood plain, or any other sensitive area. Sand that is used in sandbags can be abrasive, dusty, and contain clay that can stain clothing.

Additional Information:

- For questions concerning the disposal of sandbags, contact IDEM's Office of Land Quality toll free at (800) 451-6027 option 6, or (317) 234-6923.