



Sandbag Disposal

Office of Land Quality

317-234-6923 • 800-451-6027

idem.IN.gov

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. Sandbags may also 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. Information regarding this policy is on the IDEM website at idem.IN.gov/resources/nonrule-policies.
- Proper sandbag disposal depends on what the sandbags have been exposed to.
- Sandbags that have been exposed to industrial wastes, fuel, oil or other chemicals that could harm the environment 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 to agricultural land at a rate consistent with state regulations and documented 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 under [327 IAC 19](#). All 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 reused 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 if:
 - They are covered with at least six inches of soil and vegetative cover; and
 - The cover prevents sandbags from being exposed on the surface and keeps them from deteriorating or blowing or washing away.

- IDEM does not regulate how unused sandbags are managed. Options for unused sandbags include:
 - Saving them for a future use or disposing of them in a landfill.
 - Using sand from unused sandbags as a substitute aggregate in construction.
 - Using full, unused sandbags as general fill or for berm construction, provided they are covered with at least six inches of soil and vegetation.
 - using clean sand 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:

- Safety guidelines every citizen should follow to ensure proper sandbag disposal and reuse, include:
 - Used sandbags can be extremely heavy and should be handled with care. If a person is unsure whether the sandbag has been exposed to contaminants, it is safest to dispose of them in a landfill.
 - Wear appropriate personal protective equipment — such as gloves, boots and safety glasses or goggles — to protect eyes, hands and feet from abrasions and possible contaminants.
 - Never use the sand from sandbags in children's sandboxes or playgrounds.
 - Never dispose of sand in wetlands, flood plains, or any other sensitive areas. Sand used in sandbags can be abrasive, dusty and may contain clay that can stain clothing.

Additional Information:

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