



Pollution Prevention & Soiled Rag Management

Information Sheet



Background


Rags, wipes, towels and gloves are items used within many shops, manufacturing facilities and other operations that provide an opportunity for pollution prevention. Rags, wipes and towels are used for cleaning parts, surfaces, equipment and small oily spills; and gloves are often used for safety, protection or cleanliness. These items are not typically hazardous but can become industrial or hazardous waste when they are used to absorb hazardous substances like solvents, chemicals, or oils. When disposing of these items, they could count towards your waste generator status and require proper disposal. Utilizing the best management practices along with standard operating procedures can:

- reduce overall waste, both hazardous and non-hazardous;
- reduce risk and exposure;
- reduce purchasing costs to save money; and
- improve environmental impact.

Best Management Practices

Launder and reuse


Absorbents such as rags, wipes, towels, and items such as gloves, can be sent to and cleaned by laundry services to be washed and reused. The option of laundering depends on whether absorbents are contaminated with hazardous or non-hazardous materials as well as the flammability and toxicity of the contaminants.

 For more information on regulations regarding launder and reuse of hazardous rags, wipes and towels, see IDEM's [Management of Contaminated Wipes and Reusable Items](#) Guidance Document.

The actions outlined do not replace or ensure compliance with regulatory standards set by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). If regulatory or compliance assistance is needed, refer to IDEM's **Compliance and Technical Assistance Program (CTAP)**.

Employee training


Train employees on when to use reusable materials versus disposable materials when it comes to maintaining equipment or a specific area of the facility.

 Consider implementing management procedures for rags, wipes, towels, and gloves and monitor its effectiveness.



Separate and label

Separate and label used rags, wipes towels and gloves into two containers: non-hazardous rags, wipes and towels for laundering; and hazardous rags, wipes and towels which must be disposed. This will prevent contaminating non-hazardous items with potentially hazardous rags, wipes and towels.

 Gloves can be separated and labeled separately for reuse.

Storage

Store all used rags, wipes and towels in sealed, metal, fire-resistance and leakproof containers away from high traffic areas to prevent soiled materials from touching the shop floor or contaminating other materials.



Ensure that the containers are properly labeled and in visible locations on the shop floor.

Other Pollution Prevention Ideas

Reduce use of hazardous chemicals and substances


Use solvents or chemicals only when necessary and use the least amount when possible. When applying a solvent or cleaning substance to a rag, wipe, or towel, spray it on rather than soaking or dipping the rag, wipe, or towel in the substance. Using less solvents or chemicals will reduce the amount of absorbent contamination as well as materials purchased.



Be sure to store all reusable soiled rags in metal containers that are clearly labeled to send for laundering.

Perform regular maintenance to minimize risk

Reducing the number of spills, overfills, and leaks will reduce the number of rags, wipes and towels needed to clean up. Implement good housekeeping measures like routine inspections of liquid storage areas for leaks, routine preventative maintenance of machinery, equipment, containers, and tanks, reduced distances that a substance may be transferred within the facility, and tightly closed lids always.

 Choose environmentally sustainable absorbents over disposable when possible or applicable.

Any brand names or mention of specific commercial products or services in examples does not imply endorsement by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management.

Use reusable PPE when possible

Reusable Personal Protective Equipment or PPE, like gloves, are created for durability and an array of tasks. Purchasing and managing reusable gloves will cut down on disposal costs and can be laundered instead of thrown away with each use.



Soiled reusable gloves that need to be properly managed.



Wear PPE when handling rags, wipes or towels that have been used with solvents, chemicals or oils.

Resources

IDEM's Compliance and Technical Assistance Program (CTAP) is a free and confidential service available to all Indiana businesses and regulated entities for on-site and remote assistance. Contact **CTAP** at **(317) 232-8172** or use the [CTAP Portal](#) to submit a request for confidential regulatory and technical assistance. For more information, visit idem.IN.gov/CTAP.

Participate in the **P2 Peers** pilot program to receive peer to peer assistance. To express interest or participate in the P2 Peers pilot program, fill out the matching survey <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/g/AcFJwyKrGN>

For more information and resources on rag, wipe, and towel management, pollution prevention strategies, or Peer Matching, visit idem.IN.gov/prevention.

