



Management of Absorbent Materials

FACT SHEET

The Problem With Improper Disposal

Absorbent materials used to absorb oils, greases, etc., include kitty litter, reusable mats, clay, and pig. It is the policy of the Solid Waste Section of the North Carolina Division of Waste Management that absorbents containing oil are banned from NC solid waste landfills. However, wastes generated in clean up of incidental spills such as of petroleum products at service stations are not banned. An incidental spill can be described as a small volume leak or spill that can be quickly cleaned up. Larger volumes should be handled through waste oil dealers or hazardous waste service companies.

Hazardous or Nonhazardous?

Absorbent material used to clean up spills of listed hazardous solvents such as trichloroethylene is considered a hazardous waste and must be managed as such. If absorbents are used to manage a "characteristic" hazardous waste spill and the mixture subsequently does not exhibit one or more of the four hazardous waste characteristics, it would not need to be managed as hazardous waste. If a de minimus spill of hazardous waste occurs, e.g., an insignificant non-routine release, the absorbent used to clean up the spill may not be considered to be hazardous waste unless the release is a P or U listed waste (P and U lists are in 40 CFR 261.33(c) and (f), respectively). If the absorbent is not a hazardous waste, the local landfill or waste disposal service companies can give information about disposal options. However, to use absorbents for continual or regular leaks of hazardous wastes is not a good management practice as they would require management as hazardous waste.

To Help Prevent Pollution . . .

- Use drip pans, etc., to prevent spills and repair equipment leaks as soon as possible.
- Use nonhazardous chemicals whenever possible. Investigate the possibility of replacing materials such as solvent-based cleaners with less volatile or less hazardous materials. Reducing the amounts of hazardous materials in the workplace decreases worker exposure and the company's waste management liability and costs.
- Keep lids closed on containers to prevent spills or evaporation.
- Investigate reusable or recyclable absorbents. Some absorbent suppliers sell equipment that extracts oil from absorbent, thus permitting the absorbent to be reused. Some types of absorbents are made of materials that can be laundered by a service company and reused.
- Investigate microbial absorbents. Certain microbes used in this application prevent any future leakage or disposal concerns by consuming the waste material.
- Check with the local fire inspector for any local ordinances concerning storage/handling of oily wastes.