

# MANAGING USED SHOP TOWELS AND CONTAMINATED ABSORBENT MATERIALS



## Thurston County Business Pollution Prevention Program

☎ 360-867-2664

📞 TDD: 360-867-2603



## PROPER MANAGEMENT

As they are used, shop towels, spill pads and absorbent materials can become contaminated with hazardous substances such as solvents and petroleum products and are often improperly discarded. Disposable shop towels and paper wipes are usually thrown away in the garbage despite the chemical contamination. Having these chemicals in the landfill poses a risk to sanitation workers, the environment, and the costs of operating the waste facility.

One of the most common contaminants of shop towels are solvents, which are used by businesses to clean parts and equipment. Many solvents contain chemicals that are ignitable, volatile, or toxic. Towels contaminated with solvents should not be placed in trash containers and treated like regular solid waste. Following some simple practices can save money in disposal costs, spend less time cleaning work areas, cut down on the chance of someone slipping or tracking oil outside, and presents a cleaner image to the public.

# MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

## Petroleum-contaminated Absorbent Materials

Thurston County Waste and Recovery may accept a small number of spill pads and granular absorbent materials contaminated **only** with petroleum products. Larger quantities (>55-gallon drum) of petroleum-contaminated material may be accepted for disposal on a case-by-case basis. For more information about petroleum contaminated material disposal, please call (360) 867-2664.

Some steps you can take to limit the amount of absorbents needed include:

- Use drip pans when working under cars or machinery, and place draining pans under any removed parts.
- Use funnels when pouring used oil into waste drums to reduce the chance of a spill.
- Take the time to fix small leaks or drips instead of repeatedly tossing on more absorbent material.
- Use a reusable absorbent pad to clean out sumps and oil/water separators, and carefully wring it out completely before re-using it.



## Used Shop Towels

- Reuse soiled towels by sending them to an industrial laundry that is equipped to process used shop towels and treat residual wastewater. Contact Thurston County's Hazardous Waste Hotline for a list of industrial laundry services.
- Shop towels should be stored in closed containers that are compatible with the materials being stored. Reusable shop towels are recommended over disposable wipes.
- Because of fire potential, containers holding flammable materials such as solvent-saturated rags must be managed according to all local fire district standards. Contact your local fire district for the specific requirements for these containers.
- Remove free liquids before tossing soiled shop towels into containers. Rags may not be left out to air dry to evaporate excess solvents. Free liquids should be collected and reused, or, if not reusable, managed as a separate hazardous waste stream. Do not dispose of waste solvents, sludges, or inks by pouring them into containers of used shop towels.

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, including how to set up a free on-site technical assistance visit:

- Call the Thurston County Solid & Hazardous Waste Hotline at 360-867-2664 / TDD 360-867-2603
- Email [PHSSPollutionPrevention@co.thurston.wa.us](mailto:PHSSPollutionPrevention@co.thurston.wa.us)
- Visit our website at [www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehhw/index.html](http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehhw/index.html)

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