



SOLVENT CONTAMINATED WIPES RULE

Shop towels and wipes utilized by businesses are commonly used in conjunction with solvents or other materials that contain solvents. These items are commonly generated by businesses after being used for cleaning purposes and other maintenance activities. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) issued a rule in 2013 specifically ordering the proper management and disposal of contaminated shop towels, referred to as the “Solvent Contaminated Wipes Rule”, or the “Shop Towel Rule”.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Shop Towel Rule was to provide protection to human health, as well as the environment, by establishing a guiding framework for generators and laundry facilities. The rule applies to both shop towels that are reusable as well as those that are disposable. The State of Illinois officially adopted this rule as of August 2016, and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) has the authority to monitor and enforce this rule.

The rule includes wipes that contain solvents defined as having characteristics pertaining to flammability, toxicity, corrosiveness, or reactivity, as well as wipes that contain hazardous contaminants other than solvents or cleaners. Disposable wipes that contain more than one U.S. EPA listed solvent or disposable wipes that are contaminated with ignitable solvents, which are defined as having a flashpoint of less than 140 degrees Fahrenheit, must be disposed of as hazardous waste.

STORAGE

Shop towels must be collected, stored, and transported in sealed, closed containers that are compatible with the chemicals contained by the wipes and are capable of containing liquid without leaking. Shop towels must be kept in these types of containers from the point at which they are generated, to the point at which they are disposed of. Generators of shop towels may accumulate contaminated wipes for no longer than 180 days. Containers used to store contaminated wipes must be closed at all times, unless wipes are being added or removed. The lid of the container must be affixed in a firm and completely sealed manner throughout all collection, transportation, and disposal processes. If contaminated wipes contain any liquid, all efforts must be made to manage free liquids within the container, which includes draining and/or removing free liquids from wipes according to federal and state regulatory practices. Examples include providing false bottoms within storage containers, centrifuging wipes, or wringing out wipes.

QUICK REFERENCE

- U.S. EPA issued “Solvent Contaminated Wipes Rule” in 2013.
- Illinois adopted the rule fully in 2016.
- The rule includes shop towels that are both reusable and disposable.
- A contaminated shop towel is identified as containing a solvent that displays one or more characteristics of:
 - Flammability - Less than 140° F
 - Toxicity
 - Corrosiveness
 - Reactivity
- Single-use shop towels containing ignitable or flammable solvents must be disposed of as hazardous waste.
- Shop towels must be collected, stored, and transported in sealed, leak-proof containers.
- All storage containers must be properly labeled and remain closed at all times.
- Soiled shop towels may be accumulated for no more than 180 days.
- Free liquids must be removed from containers before transport.
- Documentation is required.
- Facilities that process shop towels in any way are known as “handling facilities”.

ISTC TAP Assistance

ISTC’s Technical Assistance Program (TAP) makes businesses more competitive and resilient with sustainable business practices, technologies, and solutions. TAP offers: Comprehensive Assessments, Zero Waste and Watch₂O services.



ISTC Fact Sheet: Illinois Shop Towel Rule



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STORAGE AND LABELING

Containers within which reusable contaminated shop towels are being stored must be labeled “Excluded Solvent-Contaminated Wipes”. Documentation must be kept regarding proof of proper management of the contaminated reusable wipes, including documentation of name and address of all handlers, documentation of compliance to the 180-day time allowance for collection (including storage container labeling and date), and documentation of compliance to “no free liquids” requirement.

DISPOSAL AND HANDLING FACILITIES

Handling facilities can be defined as a facility that processes solvent-contaminated wipes that are being reused. The generator of contaminated wipes may also choose to process or clean the wipes on site, which is also regulated by the U.S. EPA, as well as state and local authorities. The disposal of non-reusable wipes must take place at a facility permitted by the U.S. EPA, either by using a landfill or combustion.

ILLINOIS IMPLICATIONS

The U.S. EPA rule referred to as the “Solvent Contaminated Wipes Rule”, or the Shop Towel Rule, has been adopted in its entirety by the State of Illinois. Wipes that contain non-hazardous materials are categorized by the IEPA as an Illinois Special Waste, therefore other disposal requirements apply.

For more information, contact the [IEPA Bureau of Land](#).
For assistance, contact [ISTC](#).



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