

Hazardous Waste: Guidelines for Rags, Wipes, Swabs, and Other Items Contaminated with Hazardous Material

Department: Environmental Protection

Program: Hazardous Waste

Owner: Program Manager

Authority: ES&H Manual, Chapter 17, Hazardous Waste¹

Rags, paper towels, wipers, cotton balls, cotton swabs, and similar materials (collectively referred to as “wipes”) are used for all sorts of processes at SLAC. If wipes become contaminated with a hazardous material, they may have to be disposed of as hazardous waste. Typically, these wastes fall into the “Oily Solids – Solvent Solids” category.

Determining If Your Used Wipes Are Hazardous Waste

Determining if a contaminated wipe is hazardous waste can be a challenge. The type of chemical used, the amount of residual chemical left in the used wipe, and the type of process that generates the contaminated wipe must all be considered when making your evaluation. The following are suggestions for managing wipes from your operations.

- If you generate wipes that are heavily soiled with a hazardous material, your wipes are most likely hazardous waste and should be managed and disposed of as such.
- If you have a process that generates wipes that are lightly to moderately soiled with a hazardous material, you have two options:
 1. Dispose of your wipes as a hazardous waste, or
 2. Collaborate with the Waste Management Group (WM) to perform an evaluation of your process and waste that will determine if your used wipes can be managed as non-hazardous waste.

Work Activities Involving Solvents

If you use solvents such as trichloroethane (TCA), isopropyl alcohol (IPA), Freon, and acetone, you may need to keep usage records to comply with air regulations. Contact the air quality program manager to request a review of your process and to obtain guidance specific to your work process.

Note It is illegal to allow chemically contaminated wipes to "dry out" to avoid managing them as hazardous waste.

Disposing of Wipes as Hazardous Waste

Most of the contaminated wipes generated at SLAC are soiled with solvents, oil, or both.

To obtain hazardous waste collection containers of various types and sizes, submit a completed Hazardous Waste Pick-up and Empty Container Request Form to WM.² Pre-

1 *SLAC Environment, Safety, and Health Manual* (SLAC-I-720-0A29Z-001), Chapter 17, “Hazardous Waste”, http://www-group.slac.stanford.edu/esh/environment/hazardous_waste/policies.htm

2 Hazardous Waste Pick-Up and Empty Container Request Form, <http://www-group.slac.stanford.edu/esh/forms/hazpickup.pdf>

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labeled containers include all of the information listed in the next section. If the waste is to be emptied daily, the container will be identified with a Hazardous Waste: Empty Daily Label.³

Safety Cans for Accumulating Contaminated Wipes

To keep work areas neat, many organizations choose to use small safety cans to temporarily accumulate contaminated wipes. If you use safety cans not labeled by WM, each can must be

- Labeled with the words “hazardous waste”
- Labeled with your name, building, room, and telephone extension
- Emptied daily into a compatible hazardous waste collection container
- Compatible with the hazardous material it will hold
- Used for only one waste type
- Labeled with the waste type (for example, “oily solids –solvent solids,” or as instructed by WM)
- Labeled with the hazardous properties of the waste (flammable, toxic, corrosive, or reactive, as instructed by WM)
- Marked with the disposal schedule
- Kept closed (except when adding or removing waste)

What If You Generate Contaminated Wipes "in the Field"?

Contaminated wipes are often generated during field work, where there is no immediate access to hazardous waste accumulation containers or safety cans. One way to dispose of contaminated wipes in the field is to use portable containers such as one- or five-gallon pails or zip-lock bags to temporarily store contaminated wipes. If you elect to use pails or bags, each of these portable containers must be labeled and handled exactly as described in the previous section.

Summary

It is the responsibility of groups or departments that generate waste to determine if their waste is hazardous, and to make sure the hazardous waste is properly managed and disposed. If your operations generate contaminated wipes, you can take the conservative approach and manage all your wipes as hazardous waste. If you believe that your contaminated wipes may not be hazardous waste, contact WM for help in evaluating your process for a formal determination.

3 Hazardous Waste: Empty Daily Label (SLAC-I-750-0A08J-007), <http://www-group.slac.stanford.edu/esh/eshmanual/references/hazwasteLabelDaily.pdf>