



COMPLIANCE SECTION

Disposal of Solvent-Contaminated Shop Towels and Wipes: Proposed Rule

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has on its regulatory agenda the development of a rule regulating solvent-contaminated shop towels and wipes. The proposed regulation is intended to provide direction to companies regarding when shop towels or wipes would need to be handled as a hazardous waste. There is an April 2002 deadline for this proposed rule from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Current regulations prohibit disposal of towels contaminated with hazardous solvents in landfills.

The goal of the rule-making is to exempt solvent-laden towels from the hazardous waste regulations if certain management practices are followed. Requirements to avoid the hazardous waste classification for the used towels will include:

- The used towels cannot release any liquid when wrung;
- The used towels are to be kept and shipped in a closed container;
- The container used to collect the towels must be labeled, “solvent-contaminated shop towels” or “solvent-contaminated wipes.”

If the towels are managed in this manner, under the proposed rule, the towels could go to a landfill as non-hazardous waste.

The purpose of the rule-making is to provide straightforward guidelines and encourage pollution prevention by simplifying the overall process of compliance and providing uniformity nationwide. Many states and various USEPA regions have already developed and implemented their own policies regarding towels and wipes. For example, currently in Ohio, the wipes must be evaluated to determine if they are a hazardous waste and can be disposed in a landfill only if they are non-hazardous (not a listed waste or a characteristic waste) and contain no free liquids.

There also will be specific requirements in the rule for industrial launderers that handle used towels and for landfills that receive used towels. USEPA had originally intended to issue a regulation regarding industrial laundries that handle contaminated towels and wipes; however, the focus of this proposed rule is to remove solvents from the towels prior to laundering.

Printing and graphics industry companies are expected to have a major stake in the rulemaking as they use a large amount of wipes during their day-to-day operations.

Summary

The USEPA’s proposed rule regarding solvent-contaminated shop towels and wipes may affect management practices at your facility. For more information regarding hazardous waste management, this proposed rule-making, or existing state policies on shop towel management, contact Emily Rynders or Tony Domanico at the Payne Firm at (513) 489-2255 or toll free at (800) 229-1443 or via e-mail at ear@paynefirm.com or aid@paynefirm.com.