

Machine Shop Checklist #8: Spent Shop Rags, Towels, and Wipes



Used paper towels, rags, and wipes may be dangerous waste, depending on the solvents used and the contaminants removed. You can help protect workers' health by selecting a safer solvent. You can also reduce your dangerous waste disposal by managing rags under option 2, 3, or 4.

Four disposal options

1. Manage as dangerous waste

- Store spent rags or wipes in a closed container labeled "Dangerous Waste" and "Toxic" or "Flammable," as appropriate. Letters must be at least one-half inch tall or readable from a distance of 25 feet.
- Keep the container closed unless it is opened to insert rags or wipes.
- Contact a vendor to dispose of the waste (ask your Ecology contact for a vendor list).

2. Manage by commercial laundering and reusing, not as dangerous waste

If your rags or wipes are contaminated only with certain solvents, they may be commercially laundered and reused. Rags contaminated with trichloroethylene (TCE) are not eligible. See [Ecology publication 19-04-016¹](#) for all the requirements. Some are:

- Label containers as "Excluded Solvent-Contaminated Wipes."
- Maintain records and accumulate wipes for no more than 180 days.
- Keep containers closed except when actively adding or removing waste.
- Remove free liquids from wipes and containers.
- A commercial laundry must pick up the wipes.

3. Manage with a vendor who takes wipes to a treatment, storage, and disposal facility (TSD), not as dangerous waste

This option has several requirements, including but not limited to:

- Label containers as "Excluded Solvent-Contaminated Wipes."
- Maintain records and accumulate wipes for no more than 180 days.
- Keep containers closed except when actively adding or removing waste.
- Remove free liquids from wipes and containers.

Ask for a copy of [Ecology publication 19-04-016¹](#) for all the requirements.

¹ "Focus on: Conditional Exclusions for Solvent-Contaminated Wipes"
(<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/1904016.html>)

4. Manage by disposing of it in the trash, not as dangerous waste

- If they are not dangerous waste, wipes can be disposed of in the trash.
- To prove that the wipes are not dangerous waste, you must designate and possibly test the wipes. Consider asking your Ecology contact for help.
- Solvents that are halogenated, corrosive, ignitable, or toxic may cause wipes to become dangerous waste.

Cross-contamination from aerosol sprays, tapping fluid, or lead, cadmium, or chrome from the machine part could also make wipes become dangerous waste. Process variability can make it difficult to test the worst-case rag. Most shops choose option 1, 2, or 3.

Contact Information

Central Region: (509) 575-2490

Eastern Region: (509) 329-3400

Northwest Region: (206) 594-0000

Southwest Region: (360) 407-6300

Webpage: ecology.wa.gov/P2

ADA Accessibility

To request an ADA accommodation, email HWTRPubs@ecy.wa.gov, call (360) 407-6700, or dial 711 for relay services. Visit ecology.wa.gov/ADA for more information.