

Oily Wastes

What are Oily Wastes?

Oily wastes represent a broad category of waste materials contaminated with petroleum-based oils. The Vermont Hazardous Waste Management Regulations (VHWMR) stipulate that wastes generated by businesses or municipalities that are greater than 5% by weight petroleum distillates are hazardous wastes identified by the VT02 hazardous waste code. Although some petroleum-containing wastes are regulated under additional hazardous waste codes because they are ignitable or contain contaminants like benzene (i.e., anything contaminated with gasoline), this fact sheet only covers wastes contaminated with oil.

Examples of oily wastes may include used:

- Absorbents like pads and booms;
- Kitty litter and other clay-based absorbent materials;
- Organic, granular absorbents like saw dust, corn cob or peat-based products;
- Floor sweepings;
- Sludge or grit from floor drain troughs;
- Oil-soaked dirt.

Are all oily wastes regulated as hazardous waste?

No. Again, only wastes that contain more than 5% by weight petroleum distillates are regulated under the VT02 waste code. The VHWMR do contain exemptions for some oily wastes so long as certain conditions are met. These “conditional” exemptions are identified later in this fact sheet.

What is the best way to determine if wastes are more than 5% by weight petroleum distillates?

For absorbents, the weight of the uncontaminated material can be compared with its weight after use to see if there has been at least a 5% increase. If the contaminated material is heavier by more than 5%, it is probably hazardous waste (dirt, water and other non-petroleum contaminants can also account for some of the increase). Manufacturers of most oil-absorbing products claim that they will absorb 50% or more of their original weight in oil.

For oil-contaminated liquids, dirt or other debris, a sample can be taken to an environmental laboratory and analyzed for total petroleum hydrocarbons (TPH). Copies of the test results should be kept on file. Analytical testing does not have to be performed again unless the generator (the business or municipality) has reason to suspect that the composition of the waste has changed.

What if contaminated material is less than 5% by weight petroleum distillates?

Oily waste less than or equal to 5% petroleum distillate can be disposed of as regular solid waste in the trash. Contaminated dirt or floor sweepings should never be spread outside to mix with uncontaminated soils.

Wastewater that has picked up small amounts of oil must pass through an oil/water separator (See [Fact Sheet on Oil/Water Separators](#)) prior to discharge to a municipal wastewater treatment plant. Oily wastewater should never be discharged to an on-site septic system.

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What are oily wastes that are conditionally exempt from the VHWMR?

The following oily wastes greater than 5% by weight petroleum are exempt from regulation as hazardous wastes (and therefore are not considered in determining the generator status of the business) so long as they are managed with conditions stipulated in the VHWMR.

- Oil filters (section 7-203(o)); (See [Fact Sheet on Oil Filters.](#))
- Commercially-Laundered Wipers (section 7-203(w)); (See [Fact Sheet on Shop Rags Contaminated with Used Oil or Hazardous Waste.](#))
- Petroleum-contaminated soil (section 7-203(p)); this exemption is intended for contaminated properties and has many stringent conditions with it.
- All household wastes (section 7-203(a));
- Reusable absorbents (section 7-203(x)); see next question.

Can oil-soaked absorbent material be wrung out and reused?

Yes. The VHWMR provide for the reuse of wring-able pads, booms and other absorbent materials so long as they are processed and reused on site. If contaminated absorbents are stored prior to processing, containers must be:

- ✓ Marked with words that identify the contents (i.e. “oily absorbents for reuse”);
- ✓ Kept closed except to add or remove material;
- ✓ In good condition; and
- ✓ Located on an impervious surface and if kept outside, within a structure that sheds rain and snow.

What about any oil that is recovered?

Free liquid oil that is recovered by the wringing of absorbent material, skimmed from an oil/water separator, or otherwise drained, separated or removed from materials contaminated with oil, may be managed as “used oil” under Subchapter 8 of the VHWMR. See Fact Sheet(s) on [Used Oil](#) and [Used Oil Burning](#).

Can oily wastewater be evaporated?

After free oil has been removed, oily wastewater may be evaporated provided:

- ✓ It is non-hazardous OR hazardous waste only because it contains greater than 5% by weight petroleum distillate;
- ✓ The facility has received approval from Vermont’s Air Pollution Control Division to operate evaporation equipment; and
- ✓ Oily residue remaining after evaporation is managed either as “used oil” or as hazardous waste.

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Best Management Practices

Identify the circumstances that result in oil reaching the shop floor. Implement a preventive maintenance program to minimize the generation of oily waste. Common techniques include:

- ✓ Using drip pans, funnels, drain trays, etc. to catch and transfer fluids to appropriate containers;
- ✓ Cleaning floors regularly to remove dirt before it has a chance to become contaminated;
- ✓ Avoiding the sweeping of dirt and debris into floor troughs or basins.
- ✓ If a spill does occur, avoid the use of absorbents if possible by collecting liquid oil with a squeegee or oil-only wet-vacuum. Oil can then be managed as “used oil”.
- ✓ Keep a small supply of absorbent material on-site to clean up residual oil that cannot be collected.
- ✓ If it is necessary to use absorbent materials to clean up an oil spill, use reusable pads or booms if possible. Otherwise use absorbent material(s) that has a high absorbency to weight ratio, and use it until saturated.

For more information contact:

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