

May 2007

Steam Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations

Carpet cleaning companies need to be aware of the environmental regulations that apply to them. For these companies, commonly small businesses, it can be difficult to identify and keep up with the environmental laws that apply. To help your company in understanding the environmental laws, this fact sheet outlines the requirements for managing wastewater from carpet cleaning.

The environmental terms that are highlighted in **bold** are defined in the glossary at the end of this fact sheet.

Environmental regulations that apply to carpet cleaning companies

Wastewater generated from carpet cleaning can contain contaminants like detergents, disinfectants, dirt and carpet fibers. If a carpet cleaning company doesn't properly manage its wastewater, these contaminants can be carried directly into creeks, rivers, wetlands or other surface waters, polluting the water and threatening aquatic life.

Under the Clean Water Act, a company cannot discharge process wastewater directly into "**waters of the state**" without obtaining a permit from the EPA. By directly discharging or allowing wastewater to run into creeks,

rivers, lakes, etc., your company can be found in violation of the Clean Water Act. This includes discharging wastewater into conveyance systems (for example, ditches and storm sewers) that lead to surface waters.

The Division of Surface Water at Ohio EPA is responsible for the Clean Water Act regulations and for issuing permits for wastewater discharge activities. In many cases, the local wastewater treatment plants (or **POTWs**) are also responsible for regulating the companies that discharge wastewater to them.

What is the proper way to dispose of wastewater from steam cleaning carpets?

The proper way to dispose of wastewater from carpet cleaning is to discharge it to the local POTW through a **sanitary sewer**.

For each site you are working at, inspect the area to find out if there is access to a sanitary sewer. Drains and gutters that are found outside buildings, in parking lots or along the streets are usually NOT sanitary sewers. They are usually storm sewers that lead directly to a stream, river or other water body. You CANNOT discharge wastewater directly into storm sewers.



Also, you should NOT discharge any wastewater into any drain or sewer system if you do not know where it leads.

If the business or home where you are working at is connected to a sanitary sewer, you can discharge directly to the **POTW** from that location. This usually means running wastewater into a utility sink, toilet or floor drain - taking steps to ensure that drains/pipes at the business or home do not get clogged with dirt or fibers.

Another option includes collecting the wastewater and arranging for disposal at the local POTW. Some POTWs have designated locations for dropping off trucked wastewater (usually called a "trucked waste disposal site"). Other POTWs require that trucked wastewater be delivered directly to the treatment plant. You need to contact the POTW ahead of time to find out where wastewater should be taken and if there are any other requirements you need to follow.



Steam Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations

A large wastewater treatment plant will usually have no problem in handling your wastewater and will require no pretreatment (like oil or grease removal, for example). A smaller treatment plant, however, may have some special requirements for you to follow. If you have any questions about whether the area you are working is connected to a sanitary sewer or about sending wastewater to the POTW, these should be addressed directly to the POTW before beginning the job. Do NOT let wastewater run outside a building or home into a storm sewer. It is also not acceptable to let wastewater run outside and sit in areas such as parking lots or driveways to evaporate off. Also, you should NOT dispose of wastewater into a sanitary sewer through a manhole. In many areas, there are strict local ordinances against lifting covers and disposing of wastes into manholes.

What are my disposal options if I work in a rural area?

Businesses and homes located in rural areas may not be connected to a POTW. Many of these locations have **residential treatment systems** on the property like septic tanks or aeration systems that are used to handle wastewater and sewage. Ohio EPA has strict regulations that prohibit the discharge of industrial wastewater that contains chemical contaminants (like solvents) into septic and aeration systems. Local health departments also have regulations

regarding residential treatment systems. In many cases, they do not recommend that carpet cleaning wastewater be discharged into a system like a septic tank because most cannot handle large quantities of wastewater. If the volume is too great for the system to handle, the wastewater will flow untreated through the system. In addition, carpet fibers and dirt may plug the system.

If your company is considering wastewater discharge into a residential treatment system, you can only discharge wastewater that has NO chemical contaminants. In addition, care needs to be taken to ensure that the volume of wastewater is not too great for the system to properly handle. When working in a rural area, you will need to make arrangements to ensure that wastewater is properly managed. Again, this may mean collecting the wastewater and arranging for disposal at the local POTW.

What are common violations that Ohio EPA sees?

Common violations include situations where carpet cleaning companies discharge wastewater directly into creeks, rivers, ditches or other “waters of the state.” This includes companies that pump or allow wastewater to run directly into storm sewers.

Another violation includes failing to properly collect or dispose of wastewater. This includes companies that discharge wastewater into paved parking lots or driveways, allowing wastewater to sit and evaporate.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- You can discharge to a POTW through the sanitary sewer. This can be at the business or residential site you are working at. You can also arrange for disposal of wastewater at the POTW or at their designated trucked waste disposal site.
- Discharging wastewater to a residential treatment system like a septic tank is NOT recommended and discharging wastewater that contains contaminants (like solvents) into such a system is strictly PROHIBITED.
- NEVER discharge directly to storm sewers or waters of the state (such as ponds, streams, ditches, wetlands, lakes etc.). DO NOT discharge and allow wastewater to sit in areas such as parking lots, catch basins, driveways, etc.

Steam Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations

By taking steps to ensure that wastewater from your carpet cleaning business is properly managed, you can avoid the possibility of fines or violations and help keep our water resources clean. If you have any additional questions on proper disposal of wastewater, contact your local Ohio EPA district office, Division of Surface Water. See map for contacts. Questions about discharging wastewater into POTWs should be addressed to the pre-treatment coordinator at your local wastewater treatment plant.

You can also contact Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) for help. OCAPP is a non-regulatory office of Ohio EPA with a goal of helping small businesses comply with environmental regulations and permitting requirements. If you are operating a small business with fewer than 100 employees, we can help you! For more information, contact OCAPP at 800-329-7518, or visit our Web site at www.epa.state.oh.us/ocapp/sb/index.html.

Glossary

POTW: Called a publicly owned treatment works. A treatment plant that handles sewage and wastewater from homes and businesses. Many POTWs are owned and run by the city. Waste is treated at the POTW and then discharged, usually to a stream, river or lake.

Residential treatment system: A septic or aeration system designed to treat sanitary waste/wastewater generated from a one-family, two-family or three-family dwelling. Septic systems are commonly found at homes where sanitary sewers are not available.

Sanitary sewer: Rest rooms and sinks in many homes and businesses (especially in cities) are hooked up to a sanitary sewer. Wastes travel through a system of pipes to a local sewage/ wastewater treatment plant (a POTW).

Storm sewer: A collection system for rainwater. These types of sewers usually include the gutter systems that you see along streets and roads. Rainwater collected in storm sewers travels directly to a ditch, stream, river, etc. without being treated.

Waters of the state: Water bodies like rivers, lakes, wetlands, creeks. Other systems that convey water like ditches or storm sewers commonly lead to waters of the state.

Steam Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations

Ohio EPA District Offices



Toll-free numbers are for citizens with questions or concerns about environmental issues. The regulated community should use the business line for routine business. Spills and emergencies should be reported to (800) 282-9378.

CDO Central District Office
50 W. Town St. Suite 700
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 728-3778
(614) 728-3898 Fax
(800) 686-2330
www.epa.state.oh.us/cdo

NWDO Northwest District Office
347 N. Dunbridge Rd.
Bowling Green, OH 43402
(419) 352-8461
(419) 352-8468 Fax
(800) 686-6930
www.epa.state.oh.us/nwdo

SEDO Southeast District Office
2195 Front St.
Logan, OH 43138
(740) 385-8501
(740) 3856490 Fax
(800) 686-7330
www.epa.state.oh.us/sedo

NEDO Northeast District Office
2110 E. Auroa Rd.
Twinsburg, OH 44087
(330) 963-1200
(330) 487-0769 Fax
(800) 686-6330
www.epa.state.oh.us/nedo

SWDO Southwest District Office
401 E. Fifth St.
Dayton, OH 45402-6357
(937) 285-6357
(937) 285-6249 Fax
(800) 686-6357
<http://swdoweb.epa.state.oh.us>