

Steam Carpet Cleaning and Environmental Regulations

Introduction

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 understand 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 or **storm sewers**) that lead to surface waters.

The Division of Surface Water at Ohio EPA is responsible for enforcing the Clean Water Act regulations and for issuing permits for wastewater discharge activities in Ohio. In many cases, the local municipality is also responsible for regulating the companies that discharge wastewater to the sewage treatment plant or **publicly owned treatment works (POTW)**.

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**.



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 an onsite sewage treatment system such as a septic tank and leach field system 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 surface waters (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.

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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 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 a drain or sewer system if you do not know where it leads.

If the business or home where you are working is connected to a sanitary sewer, you can discharge directly to the POTW from that location. This can be done by discharging the wastewater into a utility sink, toilet or floor drain, as long as steps are taken 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.

A large wastewater treatment plant will usually have no problem handling your wastewater and will require no pretreatment (like oil or grease removal, for example). A smaller treatment plant, however, may have additional requirements for you to follow. If you have any questions about whether the home or business is connected to a sanitary sewer or about sending wastewater to the POTW, these should be addressed directly to the local wastewater treatment plant 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 collect in areas such as parking lots or driveways to evaporate. Also, you should NOT dispose of wastewater into a sanitary sewer through a manhole. In many areas, there are strict local ordinances prohibiting removal of manhole covers and disposal 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. They may have an **on-site sewage treatment system** such as a septic tank with leach field or an aeration system that is 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 on-site wastewater treatment systems. Local health departments also have regulations regarding household sewage treatment systems. In many cases, they do not recommend that carpet cleaning wastewater be discharged into household systems because most cannot handle chemicals and/or large quantities of wastewater. If the quantity 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 the discharge of wastewater into an on-site sewage treatment system, you can only do so if the wastewater contains NO chemical contaminants. In addition, care needs to be taken to ensure that the quantity 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 surface waters. 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 evaporate.

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

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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 local wastewater treatment plant.

You can also contact Ohio EPA's Office of Compliance Assistance and Pollution Prevention (OCAPP) for help. OCAPP is an independent, non-regulatory office within Ohio EPA that provides businesses with free, confidential information about environmental regulations, compliance concerns and pollution prevention. For more information, contact OCAPP at 800-329-7518, or visit our website at epa.ohio.gov/ocapp.

Glossary

On-site Sewage Treatment System: A disposal system designed to use soil absorption to treat sanitary wastewater generated from a residence or business. These systems are commonly found in areas where sanitary sewers are not available.

Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTW): A treatment plant that handles sewage and other wastewater from homes and businesses. Many POTWs are owned and operated by a city or county. Wastewater is treated at the POTW and then discharged, usually to a stream, river or lake.

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 POTW for treatment.

Storm sewers: A collection system for rainwater. These types of sewers may include the gutter systems that you see along streets and roads or in parking lots. Rainwater collected in storm sewers travels directly into a stream, river or other water body without being treated.

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

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Ohio EPA District Offices

Central District Office

50 W. Town St., Suite 700
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 728-3778
Fax: (614) 728-3898
Non-Emergency Complaints:
(800) 686-2330
epa.ohio.gov/districts.aspx

Northeast District Office

2110 E. Aurora Rd.
Twinsburg, OH 44087
(330) 963-1200
Fax: (330) 487-0769
Non-Emergency Complaints:
(800) 686-6330
epa.ohio.gov/districts.aspx

Northwest District Office

347 N. Dunbridge Rd.
Bowling Green, OH 43402
(419) 352-8461
Fax: (419) 352-8468
Non-Emergency Complaints:
(800) 686-6930
epa.ohio.gov/districts.aspx

Southeast District Office

2195 Front St.
Logan, OH 43138
(740) 385-8501
Fax: (740) 385-6490
Non-Emergency Complaints: (800) 686-7330
epa.ohio.gov/districts.aspx

Southwest District Office

401 E. Fifth St.
Dayton, OH 45402
(937) 285-6357
Fax: (937) 285-6249
Non-Emergency Complaints: (800) 686-8930
epa.ohio.gov/districts.aspx



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.