

COMMON HAZARDOUS WASTE PROBLEMS AT SMALL BUSINESSES

EPA considers activities that increase the potential for releases or mismanagement of hazardous wastes to be very serious violations. Examples of such violations are dumping hazardous wastes or sending it to a facility that is not authorized to handle it. Another way a small business can commit a violation, is to exceed the regulated generation rate or storage time limit.

Accumulating too much hazardous waste for too long substantially increases the likelihood of a release. Drums are more likely to corrode and fail, and spills are more likely. EPA generally addresses the storage of too much hazardous waste for too long by assessing penalties.

As a general rule, if a facility generates less than 2,200 pound of hazardous waste per month, the waste should be shipped to an authorized facility every 180 days. If a facility generates more than 2,200 pound of hazardous waste per month, the operator has 90 days to ship all of that waste to an authorized facility. These 180- and 90-day rules will work for most hazardous waste generated at small businesses.

Another frequently noted area for violations is improper or poor management of hazardous waste containers. The EPA allows hazardous waste containers to be open only when adding or removing wastes. At all other times, the containers must be kept closed. This helps ensure that the wastes will not be released through evaporation or accidental spills. The containers must be labeled with the words "Hazardous Waste," to alert personnel to not improperly dispose of the containers.

In the event of a spill or leak, it will be clear that hazardous wastes are involved so that proper safety precautions can be taken. The containers must be labeled with the starting date of the accumulation period so that they are not stored for too long. Frequently, EPA finds hazardous waste containers unlabeled, undated, or open. Drums and pails are commonly found with no lids, unsecured lids, open bung holes, or funnels sitting in open bung holes. All of these situations are violations and possible penalties can be assessed. Proper management of hazardous waste can provide safer working conditions for employees and eliminate possible penalties by the EPA.