

9487.1995(01)

Hotline Questions and Answers

January 1995

1. The Liquids in Landfills Prohibition and Sorbed Free Liquids

EPA prohibits the direct placement in a hazardous waste landfill of liquid hazardous waste or hazardous waste containing free liquids (40 CFR 264/265.314(b)). The Agency also prohibits the placement in a hazardous waste landfill of containers holding free liquids, except for lab packs, very small containers (i.e., ampules) and containers designed to hold free liquids for use other than storage (i.e. batteries) (264.314(d)(2), (3), and (4) and 265.314(c)(2), (3), and (4)). On November 18, 1992 (57 FR 54454), the Agency retained the Paint Filter Liquids Test (PFT) as the required test to determine if hazardous wastes hold free liquids. If the PFT demonstrates that a waste to which sorbents have been added no longer contains free liquids, may the waste be placed in a landfill or is additional treatment required?

EPA's criteria for the use of sorbents to treat wastes containing free liquids vary according to whether the wastes will be disposed of directly or will be placed in a container prior to disposal. EPA allows the use of sorbents to remove free liquids from "containerized" wastes. If the PFT demonstrates that a containerized waste to which sorbents have been added contains no free liquids, the waste may be disposed of in a hazardous waste landfill (40 CFR 264.314(d)(1)(ii) and 265.314(c)(1)(ii)), provided that it all meets all applicable land disposal restriction (LDR) treatment standards. As a precaution against the use of inadequate sorbents, EPA regulations require that sorbents used to treat free liquids prior to land disposal be nonbiodegradable (40 CFR 264.314(e) and 265.314(f)).

EPA prohibits the use of sorbents to treat liquid hazardous waste or hazardous waste containing free liquids that will be disposed of directly (e.g., without first being placed in a container) in a landfill. Free liquids in such "bulk or noncontainerized" hazardous wastes must be "chemically, thermally, physically, or biologically treated without the use of absorbents" before the wastes may be landfilled (OSWER Directive #9487.00-2A). To demonstrate that chemical stabilization rather than absorption or adsorption is occurring, the bulk or noncontainerized hazardous wastes should undergo an indirect chemical stabilization test (also known as an unconfined compressive strength test). The indirect chemical stabilization test ensures that, prior to direct disposal, liquid hazardous wastes or hazardous wastes containing free liquids wastes have been adequately treated through some means other than the addition of sorbents.