

The Honorable Thomas Carper  
United States Senate  
513 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Carper:

Thank you for your letter of April 10, 2002, encouraging the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to carefully examine the policy objectives associated with how EPA deals with reusable shop towels and other textiles before issuing a proposed regulation for the management of these materials.

At this time, EPA has not determined what, if any, regulatory action may be appropriate for solvent-contaminated shop towels. We are, however, looking carefully at the possibility of providing an exclusion from the definition of solid waste for these materials in response to stakeholder input. EPA's offices are working cooperatively to develop a proposal that ensures that solvents which contaminate shop towels are managed in an environmentally sound manner at the lowest possible cost to the regulated community.

Some background information may help you in understanding the issues surrounding this waste stream. The Agency's efforts were initiated as a result of petitions from various industries. In particular, small businesses that use either disposable wipes or reusable shop towels in the workplace have requested that EPA revise its regulations. Although the states have developed policies on contaminated wipes, they differ from state to state and generators have asked for a federal rulemaking to encourage consistency in requirements.

EPA's goal is to ensure that solvent contaminated shop towels are managed in an environmentally sound, cost-effective manner that encourages source reduction and recycling of hazardous solvents. In order to address the various viewpoints on the relevant issues, the Agency has met with key stakeholders throughout regulatory development to listen to their concerns and incorporate their comments wherever appropriate. Our efforts have included outreach to industries using these shop towels in their operations, manufacturers of shop towels and launderers and other handlers of used towels. EPA has also performed analyses of the economic impact of any future rule. It has been our policy to assess the rule's likely impact, to engage the potentially regulated entities in a dialogue regarding the rule, and to minimize costs consistent with the goals of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act.

Thank you again for your letter. We look forward to continuing to work with you and your constituents on this issue. If you have any further questions, please contact me, or your staff may contact Betsy Henry in EPA's Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at 202-564-7222.

Sincerely yours,

Christine Todd Whitman