

DRY CLEANERS

The process of dry cleaning uses a solvent, usually perchloroethylene (PERC), to clean fabrics. Dry cleaning operations and solvent recycling generate waste solutions, some of which are considered hazardous waste because they contain solvent. Discharges of solvent or solvent-containing dry cleaning waste solutions can be hazardous to the environment.

Because the sewer system was not designed to transport solvent-containing wastewater, discharge of dry cleaning solvent-containing waste solutions is prohibited. The Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plan (RWQCP) is concerned about potential dry cleaning waste discharges to the sewer system; for this reason, it has instituted an educational program to ensure that dry cleaning solvent is not discharged to the sewer or storm drain system.

Regulatory Context

Dry cleaners in the RWQCP service area must comply with many environmental requirements. Each facility that operates solvent-using dry cleaning equipment must obtain permits from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and the county hazardous waste generator program.

Dry cleaners must also file a hazardous materials management plan with the local fire or health department, and must meet fire code requirements for hazardous materials storage.

Each of the above agencies inspects dry cleaners regularly. County and local inspectors evaluate spill-protection containment of solvent storage areas. BAAQMD inspections include a check of hazardous waste disposal paperwork and an evaluation of facility operations to ensure that solvent-containing waste (including waste solvent, spilled solvent, and separator water) is not discharged to sewers or storm drains.

RWQCP Program

Because existing environmental regulatory programs enforce requirements for dry cleaning solvent storage and sewer disposal prohibitions, the RWQCP decided to pursue an educational program, with the intent of protecting the sewer system while avoiding regulatory redundancy. In 1993, the RWQCP sent a memorandum to dry cleaners reminding them of the solvent waste disposal prohibition and providing a list of solvent waste management firms.