



Iowa Department of Public Health Bureau of Environmental Health Services

Sandbag Disposal

Overview: After the threat of floodwater has passed, the large quantity of sandbags that are left must be disposed of properly for health and safety reasons. Floodwater can contaminate sandbags with sediment, bacteria, diseases, and other pathogens. Used sandbags that are not properly managed can develop mold over time.

Types of Sandbags and Sand:

There are a few options for sandbag disposal. Sandbags and sand should be managed depending on the type of bag and what has come in contact with the bags; the quality of flood waters; any additives used in the sand; and the possible use, reuse, or disposal of the bag and the sand. Sandbags are generally made from either burlap or polypropylene plastic. The type of sand used may be different, varying from large, coarse grains to fine grains that blow away easily. Some sandbags may contain salt mixed with the sand.

Safe Disposal of Sand:

- Return to the sand company
- Use on gravel road surfaces
- Spread on agricultural land
- Use as fill material under buildings, roads, parking lots, ditches, concrete, etc.
- Daily cover in a landfill, if allowable by landfill policies
- Spread in backyard or garden (areas with limited access)
- Store and use for winter road sand and de-icing

Unsafe Disposal of Sand:

- Do not place in areas with direct human contact
- Do not use in sandboxes, beaches, playgrounds, or school yards
- Do not put sand or sandbag into a body of water, wetland, flood plain, or any other environmentally sensitive area
- Placement of sand and debris into or near water may be in violation of state and federal flood plain and water quality regulations
- Disposal of contaminated sandbags should be at approved locations, call the local landfill disposal site for information

Disposal Safety:

- Use caution to avoid slipping and tripping when working around wet sandbags
- Wear gloves and boots for protection from abrasions and possible contaminants
- Wear appropriate protective gloves, eye protection, and clothing to avoid contaminants and bacteria
- Practice good hygiene and wash hands with soap and water after handling sandbags

