



## **Sandbag Cleanup After a Flood**

Once the danger of flooding is over, many cities and homeowners will be faced with cleaning up sandbags used for flood control. Sandbags should be managed depending on the type of bag; the quality of flood waters; any additives used in the sand; and the possible use, reuse or disposal of the bag and the sand.

### **Types of Sandbags and Sand**

- Sandbags made of burlap or plastic (polypropylene) are used to hold back floodwaters and prevent damage to property and buildings.
- Sand used in sandbags often includes granules of all different sizes, including coarse grains that can scratch the skin and fine grains that can be easily blown around by wind. The sandbags also can contain clay, which can stain clothing and surfaces. Some sandbags may contain salt mixed with the sand.

### **Use Caution**

- Sand that has been contaminated by oil-based or fuel products, hazardous chemicals, salt, sewage or septic waste can cause impacts on public health and the environment if they are not handled properly.
- Sand that came in contact with flood waters may contain more bacteria than normal soil.
  - **Do not place in playgrounds, sandboxes or other areas of direct human contact.**
  - Bacteria will dissipate with time and exposure to the elements.
- Improper management of sandbags following a flood emergency can lead to unwanted blowing of sand and litter from broken or leaking sandbags.

### **Disposal of Sandbags**

Proper sandbag disposal varies based on what has come into contact with the sandbags.

- ***Empty or full sandbags that have come into contact with chemicals, wastes, fuel, oil, salt, sewage or septic tank waste*** could negatively impact the environment and must be disposed of at a municipal or industrial solid waste landfill or other approved facility.
- ***If sandbags have come into contact with manure***, the sand from them may be applied on agricultural land at an application rate that is consistent with state rules. The empty bags must be disposed of at a municipal or industrial solid waste landfill.

## **Reuse of Sand and Sandbags**

*If sandbags have come into contact only with clean floodwater* or have not been used, the following are possible uses:

- Full sandbags can be used as general fill or for building of berms.
  - The sandbags must be covered with at least six inches of soil and planted with grass to keep bags from being exposed, breaking up, rotting, and blowing or washing away.
- Full sandbags of both cloth and plastic material may be reused at other flood sites or in the construction of permanent earthen structures.
  - In these cases, the bags are not considered a waste if they are reused within a short time and are not stockpiled for a long period of time.
- Unused sandbags can be saved for future use.
- Once sand has been removed from sandbags, the empty bags can be reused, recycled or disposed of to avoid litter. The sand may be reused in an area where fill placement is not prohibited, such as a base for concrete. Sand also can be stored and used for winter road sand, fill, or concrete or mortar sand.
- Sand may be sent to a municipal or industrial solid waste landfill or inert waste landfill for use as cover.

## **Your Responsibility**

Follow these safety and legal guidelines to ensure proper sandbag disposal and reuse, including:

- Use caution to avoid slipping and tripping when working around wet sandbags.
- Wear gloves and boots for protection from abrasions and possible contaminants.
- Check with local officials about options for your sandbags, especially for sandbags containing salt or other contaminants.
- Use clean sand from sandbags to add to soil in gardens or flower beds, for snow and ice control, or as base for paving blocks or sidewalks.
- **Never** use the sand from sandbags to fill children's sandboxes or playgrounds, as it is not high-quality sand and the sandbags may have been contaminated.
- **Never** dispose of sand in a wetland, flood plain, waterway or any other sensitive area.

## **More Information**

For a list of North Dakota municipal solid waste disposal sites or if you have any questions about disposing of sandbags, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 701.328.5166 or visit [www.ndhealth.gov](http://www.ndhealth.gov).