FACT SHEET April 26, 2013

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Sandbag Disposal

(317) 232-8603 • (800) 451-6027 www.idem.IN.gov 100 N. Senate Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46204

Description:

- Sandbags are used by communities and private property owners to hold back floodwaters and prevent property and structural damage.
- Sandbags can be made of burlap or plastic (polypropylene).Sand used in sandbags often includes granules of all different sizes, including coarse grains that can cause skin abrasions and fine grains that can be easily blown around by wind. The sandbags also can contain clay, which can stain clothing and surfaces.

Environmental Impacts:

- Improper management of sandbags following a flood emergency can lead to unwanted blowing of sand and litter from deteriorated sandbags.
- Sand that has been contaminated by petroleum products or hazardous chemicals has the potential to negatively impact public health and the environment, if improperly discarded.

IDEM's Role:

- The Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) is responsible for protecting human health and the environment.
- IDEM regulates the disposal of used sandbags. Proper sandbag disposal varies based on what has come in contact with the sandbags.
    - If sandbags have come in contact with industrial wastes, fuel, oil or other chemicals that could negatively impact the environment, they must be disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill.
    - If sandbags have come in contact with manure, the sand from them may be land applied on agricultural land at an application rate that is consistent with state regulations and recorded in the farm's operating record. The empty bags must be disposed of at a municipal solid waste landfill.
    - If sandbags have come in contact only with floodwater or have not been used, they may be sent to a municipal solid waste landfill or they may be used under certain conditions and restrictions. The following are alternatives to disposal:
        - Sand from used or unused sandbags can be used as substitute aggregate in construction applications;
        - Full sandbags can be used as general fill or for the construction of berms. The sandbags must be covered with a minimum of six inches of soil and vegetative cover. The cover must be in place to keep bags from being exposed on the surface and prevent them from deteriorating and blowing or washing away.
        - Unused sandbags can be saved for future use.
        - Because sand from used sandbags can be abrasive and dusty, contain clay that can stain clothing, and may have come into contact with floodwaters that can be contaminated, it should not be used where there will be direct human contact, such as a child's sandbox.

Citizen's Role:

- There are a number of safety and regulatory guidelines every citizen should follow to ensure proper sandbag disposal and reuse, including:
    - Use caution to avoid slipping and tripping when working around wet sandbags;
    - Wear gloves and boots to protect hands and feet from abrasions and possible contaminants;
    - Use clean sand from sandbags as a soil amendment in residential 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;
    - Never dispose of sand in a wetland, flood plain, or any other sensitive area.

Additional Information:

- For a list of Indiana solid waste disposal sites, visit the IDEM Web site at
- http://www.idem.IN.gov/5047.htm.
- For questions concerning the disposal of sandbags, contact Kelly Hall with IDEM's Office of Land Quality toll free at (800) 461-6027, ext. 4-8488, directly at (317) 234-8488, or via email at khall@idem.IN.gov.
- For questions concerning the reuse of sand and sandbags, contact Tracy Barnes, with IDEM's Office of Land Quality toll free at (800) 451-6027, ext. 4-6964, directly at (317) 234-6964, or via
- email at tbarnes@idem.IN.gov.
- For the IDEM Storm Damage Update, visit http://www.idem.IN.gov/5504.htm.