

Reusable Shop Towels / Industrial Wipes

Reusable shop towels or industrial wipes are finished woven cotton cloths used for cleaning equipment or for similar purposes by a variety of industries, including printing, automobile repair and equipment maintenance. The textile services industry does \$1 billion of work each year and employs over 15,000 people across the country in the shop towel segment of business alone. Our core business model is based on recycling and returning clean shop towels to our customers.

TRSA members generally own the shop towels, provide them to their customers for use, and then collect the used shop towels from various industries, launder them, and return them to the industry customer for re-use.

1. Reusable shop towels provide environmental benefits by decreasing natural resource consumption, saving energy and providing effective pollution management.
2. By reducing the volume of waste that goes to landfills and incinerators, reusable shop towels are a more environmentally friendly alternative to disposable wipes. For example, hospital gowns that are rented and cleaned after each use create four times less solid waste than paper gowns.
3. Industrial laundries are closely scrutinized by state and local regulators as a result of the industry's extensive wastewater permitting.

The textile rental services industry is one of the nation's largest reuse and recycling industries. A decade ago the industry adopted the Laundry ESP program, a voluntary pollution prevention and resource conservation program. The results have been impressive.

1. 43% pollution reduction
2. 28% reduction in water use
3. 15% reduction in greenhouse gases
4. 14% decrease in total energy use

In 2003 the EPA proposed to conditionally exclude shop towels from the definition of solid waste and hazardous waste because reusable shop towels are constantly recycled, and all contaminants washed from them are managed consistent with hazardous waste management regulations. Thus, any waste streams that do result from reusable shop towels are properly managed.

The EPA is currently reviewing a risk analysis and considering the possibility of a final shop towel rule. TRSA strongly recommends:

1. That the EPA recognizes reusable shop towels as a legitimate recycled product.
2. That the EPA work with the textile services industry to facilitate disposal of shop towel sludge in lined landfills and finalize the conditional exclusion from the definition of solid waste for shop towels.