

The Facts about Shop Towels

Reusable shop towels are a greener, more cost-effective means than disposables for removing soils in maintenance, manufacturing, cleanup and other industrial wiping tasks. Cotton shop towels are reused an average of 14 times.

Businesses That Use Them *(TRSA Customer Profile Analysis and U.S. Census)*

Some 25 industrial classifications account for essentially all shop towel use. In the United States, this product generates about \$500 million in annual revenue to textile services operations. Here are the industries that contribute most to that total (with their shop towel expense in millions):

Printing & Publishing	\$105	Business Services	\$18
Automotive Dealers & Service Stations	\$86	Rubber & Miscellaneous Plastic Products	\$17
Auto Repair, Services & Parking	\$72	Chemicals & Allied Products	\$16
Industrial Machinery & Equipment	\$42	Electric, Gas & Sanitary Services	\$12
Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industries	\$25	Miscellaneous Retail	\$10
Fabricated Metal Products	\$20	Special Trade Contractors	\$10
Wholesale Trade – Durable Goods	\$20		

Better for the Economy *(TRSA Solid Waste Assessment of Selected Reusable and Disposable Products)*

Anytime a shop towel can be used more than once for a wiping task this is more economical than using disposables instead. One reusable towel often handles the work of several paper or nonwoven wipers:

- A wiping task that requires 2 disposables alternatively handled by one shop towel that's sent for washing immediately after performing the task saves 15%
- A task that requires 1 disposable but a shop towel performs three times before washing: 44% less
- A 1-disposable task that a shop towel handles five times before washing: 66% less
- A light task that wouldn't saturate a disposal but it's discarded anyway—the kind of job that a shop towel does 10 times before washing: 83% less

Less Solid Waste Generated *(TRSA Solid Waste Assessment of Selected Reusable and Disposable Products)*

Throughout the lifecycle of a disposable industrial wiper, from its manufacturing to its discarding into the solid waste stream, its impact on solid waste is greater than reusables when:

- For a task requiring 2 disposables that a single shop towel handles and is washed immediately thereafter: the disposables generate 2.6 times as much solid waste as the shop towel.
- A 3-disposable task that a shop towel performs and then requires washing: 3.9x
- A 1-disposable task that a shop towel performs three times before washing: 3.2x
- A lighter 1-disposable task, the equivalent of a job that a shop towel does five times before washing: 5.1x

Avoids Packaging Waste *(TRSA Solid Waste Assessment of Selected Reusable and Disposable Products)*

Single-use products generate more packaging waste per task than their reusable equivalents. Thus disposable wipers contribute more than reusables not only to the largest classification of goods in MSW (paper and paperboard), they also are a greater factor in the 38 million tons of such packaging that enter the wastestream. Specifics:

- A task that requires one disposable generates 4.2 times as much packaging waste as a single shop towel that handles this job and is sent for washing immediately thereafter
- A 2-disposable task that a shop towel handles before washing: 8.5x

Conserves Energy through Product Lifecycle *(EPA Assessment of Shop Towel Usage in Automotive & Printing)*

Both reusables and disposables consume the most energy in their genesis: acquiring raw materials for their manufacturing. But nonwoven and paper towels use more energy once manufacturing begins. Overall energy usage for reusables is just 10% of the requirement for nonwoven and paper towels—even though cloth towels are shipped back and forth to textile services plants for laundering.