

How-to

# How to Empty and Clean Spill Containment Berms

Brought To You by Justrite | Apr 28, 2021

Spills in the workplace can lead to injuries, illness, fires and more. It's important to stock your facility with effective spill containment equipment. **Spill containment berms** are designed for quick and simple deployment of preventative, emergency, and decontamination applications. These help you meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spill prevention, containment, and stormwater regulations.

But after the berm does its job and contains a hazardous spill, how do you safely empty and clean it?

According to the **EPA's Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) Regulation**, if you own or operate a non-transportation-related onshore facility that can potentially "cause substantial harm to the environment by discharging oil into or on the navigable waters or adjoining shorelines," you'll need a facility response plan. This plan should include employee training, response equipment, and secondary containment. Training your workers in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) will ensure that they can respond quickly and safely when a spill occurs.

Spill containment berms should be placed underneath buckets, drums, and any type of equipment that can potentially leak. Once your facility has containment berms in place, you're prepared for a spill. But if a spill occurs, what's your next step? First, if the spill contains hazardous material, anyone who could encounter it should put on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as gloves, safety goggles, and respiratory protection.

## Best Practices for Emptying and Cleaning a Spill Containment Berm

What do you do with the hazardous material in the berm? While dumping the waste into a garbage can might seem like the easiest solution, don't do it – it can cause a fire.

Instead, use absorbent material like pads, socks, and pillows to soak up the spill. The type of absorbent you use depends on the type of material involved in the spill. **Hazmat absorbents** are best for spills involving solvents, chemicals, bases, and unknown oil or water-based liquids. If oil or petroleum is spilled, use **oil-only absorbents**. **Universal absorbents** are appropriate for spills involving water, petroleum, or chemicals.

After you soak up a hazardous chemical spill, dispose of the absorbent material in plastic drums or pails. If the spill is small and not flammable or hazardous, you can dispose of the absorbents in a plastic bag.

With hazardous waste, you'll also need to label the drums or pails and follow EPA regulations. These require the waste must be transported from your workplace to a "facility that can recycle, treat, store or dispose of the waste." A hazardous waste transport company can take care of this step for you.

After soaking up the spilled chemicals, clean the containment berm with water, detergent, or bleach, depending on what type of liquid was spilled. Absorbents are helpful for drying damp surfaces.

If any of your clothing comes in contact with hazardous waste, decontaminate or dispose of the items. It's also important to note that some spills might involve flammable or toxic materials that your workers may not be able to safely clean up. In cases like this, it's best to evacuate and call 911. When in doubt, let the experts handle it.

Justrite supplies everything you need to contain spills in your facility. Their ***QuickBerm® and Rigid-Lock QuickBerm® products*** are available in a variety of sizes to protect your personnel and your equipment from harm.

*Previously Featured on Justrite's Workplace Safety Articles and News.*

*Browse the Safety Guidebook on MSCDirect.com for spill control, containment and storage products to make your workplace safer.*

**[www.mscdirect.com/betterMRO](http://www.mscdirect.com/betterMRO)**

Copyright ©2025 MSC Industrial Supply Co.