

WHITE PAPER

Hazardous Waste in the Collision Repair Industry: An Essential Guide for Compliance and Risk Management

JUNE 2024

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Balancing Vehicle Safety with Environmental Risks

The collision repair industry is integral to maintaining vehicle safety and aesthetics. However, the industry's operations generate hazardous waste that – if improperly handled – may pose significant environmental and health risks. This whitepaper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of hazardous waste in the collision repair industry, its evolution, regulatory requirements and the implications of non-compliance. The focus is on the costs associated with hazardous waste management, emphasizing the importance of compliance for both the collision repair shop and their insurance company partners.

What is Hazardous Waste?

Hazardous waste in the collision repair industry includes substances that are dangerous or potentially harmful to human health or the environment. Key hazardous wastes generated include:



Paint and Coatings: Once these materials are no longer in use, they become hazardous waste. They contain solvents and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that are ignitable.



Solvents and Thinners: When disposed of, these become hazardous waste due to their ignitable and harmful chemical content.



Contaminated Rags and Wipes: After use, these items become hazardous waste as they are soaked with hazardous substances, posing fire risks and environmental hazards if not disposed of properly.



Aerosol Cans: Once emptied or discarded, they become hazardous waste. They often contain pressurized chemicals that can be ignitable and pose explosion hazards.



Oil and Antifreeze: Used automotive fluids are classified as hazardous waste due to their toxicity and potential to cause environmental harm if not properly recycled or disposed of.

These substances are considered hazardous due to their ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, or toxicity. Proper handling, storage, and disposal are crucial to mitigate their risks to health and the environment

Evolution of Hazardous Waste Management

Over the years, the management of hazardous waste in the collision repair industry has evolved significantly and there has been increased regulatory scrutiny and advancements in waste management technologies. Initially, waste was often disposed of in landfills or incinerated without proper controls, leading to environmental contamination and health risks for humans and other organisms sharing our ecosystem.

Today, regulatory bodies enforce strict guidelines to ensure proper handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous waste. These regulations have driven the adoption of safer practices and technologies, such as low-VOC paint products and advanced filtration systems for air emissions.

The evolution of paint, materials, and vehicle technology has also played a crucial role in hazardous waste management. Modern automotive paints are designed to be less hazardous, and the shift towards electric and hybrid vehicles has changed the types and quantities of hazardous waste generated. However, these advancements come with increased costs for collision repairers. Specialized handling and disposal procedures for new materials, such as advanced batteries and electronic components, often require additional resources and investment.

Moreover, the use of low-VOC paints and advanced filtration systems, while environmentally beneficial, can also increase operational costs due to the need for specialized equipment and training.

Regulatory compliance itself can be costly, as collision repairers must continuously invest in updated technologies and processes to meet evolving standards.

While the collision repair industry has made significant strides in hazardous waste management, these improvements have brought about increased costs for repairers. These costs are associated with adopting new technologies, ensuring regulatory compliance, and managing the disposal of more complex hazardous materials. The industry's ongoing commitment to environmental safety and regulatory adherence remains a critical yet financially impactful aspect of modern collision repair operations.

Federal Regulating Bodies

Several federal agencies oversee hazardous waste management in the United States, including:

- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):** Sets the national standards for hazardous waste management under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA).
- **Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA):** Regulates workplace safety, including handling hazardous materials.
- **Department of Transportation (DOT):** Oversees the transportation of hazardous waste to ensure safety and compliance during transit.

Variations Across State Regulations

While federal agencies provide overarching guidelines, state regulations can vary significantly and are oftentimes stricter than federal guidelines¹. These variations arise due to differences in environmental conditions, public health concerns, and state-level policy priorities. These complexities add to the compliance burdens for businesses such as collision repair shops.

¹ See <https://www.hazardouswasteexperts.com/environmental-regulations-more-stringent-than-epa/>

State Examples:



1. California: Known for having the most stringent environmental regulations, California requires detailed hazardous waste management plans, extensive employee training, and regular inspections.

Regulatory Reference: California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC).



2. New York: Emphasizes detailed record-keeping and frequent reporting to state authorities.

Regulatory Reference: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).



3. Texas: Follows federal guidelines closely but has specific requirements for storage and disposal in areas prone to natural disasters.

Regulatory Reference: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).



4. Florida: Focuses on waste minimization and recycling, with incentives for businesses that adopt green practices.

Regulatory Reference: Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).



5. Ohio: Requires periodic audits and assessments to ensure ongoing compliance with hazardous waste regulations.

Regulatory Reference: Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Costs and Investments

Managing hazardous waste requires significant investment in compliant infrastructure, training, and proper disposal methods. These costs are necessary to prevent environmental contamination and avoid legal and financial repercussions. For collision repair shops, these expenses are considered a pass-through cost, ultimately reflected in the pricing of their services.

Hazardous Waste Processes for Paint Removal in California:

In California, collision repair shops must follow stringent processes for paint removal, including:



1. Identification and Segregation:

Proper labeling and storage of hazardous waste in approved containers.

Regulatory Reference: California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 22.



2. Use of Low-VOC Products:

Adoption of low-VOC or VOC-free paint strippers and thinners.

Regulatory Reference: California Air Resources Board (CARB).



3. Proper Storage and Disposal:

Use of compatible containers with tight-fitting lids, proper labeling, and disposal through certified transporters.

Regulatory Reference: CCR, Title 22, Section 66262.34.



4. Employee Training:

Comprehensive training on hazardous waste handling and emergency response.

Regulatory Reference: CCR, Title 22, Section 66265.16.



5. Spill Prevention and Emergency Response:

Implementation of Hazardous Materials Business Plan (HMBP) and regular emergency drills.

Regulatory reference: California Health and Safety Code, Division 20, Chapter 6.95, Section 25500.



6. Recordkeeping and Reporting:

Detailed records of hazardous waste activities and annual reporting to the DTSC.

Regulatory Reference: CCR, Title 22, Section 66262.40.

Audit Frequency

Collision repair shops are typically audited for hazardous waste compliance every two to three years, but the frequency can increase if there are violations or higher environmental risks associated with the facility.

[\(Repairer Driven News\)](#) [\(Repairer Driven News\)](#)

A Leading Collision Repairer Example

A prominent collision repair company faced severe penalties due to non-compliance with hazardous waste regulations. The specific issues included improper storage, lack of proper waste characterization, inadequate employee training, and insufficient documentation. These violations resulted in substantial fines, totaling \$2.35 million, mandatory corrective actions and ongoing monitoring.

[\(CollisionWeek\) \(TCEQ\)](#)

The repercussions for non-compliance extend beyond financial penalties. They include potential legal actions, increased scrutiny from regulatory bodies, and damage to the company's reputation. For insurance companies, associating with non-compliant repair shops poses risks such as liability for environmental damages and higher costs due to regulatory fines.

[\(Repairer Driven News\)](#)

Summary of Specific Non-Compliance Issues and Repercussions found in a Leading Collision Repairer:

1. Improper Storage and Labeling of Hazardous Waste:

- Hazardous waste was stored in containers that were not properly labeled, leading to safety and environmental hazards.
- Resulted in significant fines and required immediate corrective actions to comply with regulations.

2. Failure to Perform Adequate Waste Characterization:

- The company did not adequately characterize waste to determine if it was hazardous, a crucial step for proper handling and disposal.
- Led to additional scrutiny and mandatory improvements in waste management practices.

3. Lack of Employee Training:

- Employees were not properly trained in hazardous waste management, leading to improper handling and increased risks of spills and exposure.
- A leading Collision Repairer was required to implement comprehensive training programs for their staff.

4. Inadequate Documentation and Reporting:

- The company failed to maintain accurate records of hazardous waste activities, including generation, storage, and disposal.
- This lack of documentation was a violation of regulatory requirements, resulting in fines and mandatory documentation improvements.

5. Spill Prevention and Emergency Response Deficiencies:

- The company did not have proper spill prevention and emergency response plans in place, increasing the risk of environmental contamination and safety hazards for workers and the community.
- Required a leading Collision Repairer to develop and implement detailed spill prevention and emergency response plans.

These examples highlight the critical need for strict adherence to hazardous waste regulations in the collision repair industry is crucial to avoid penalties, legal actions, and reputational damage. Insurance companies should partner with repair shops that have compliant environmental and safety programs to mitigate risks and liabilities.

[\(Repairer Driven News\)](#) [\(Repairer Driven News\)](#)

Other Key Illustrative Cases of Non-Compliance



Tesla (2023)

- **Settlement:** \$1.5 million
- **Violations:** Improper hazardous waste management and record-keeping violations.
- **Outcome:** Mandated corrective actions, enhanced training programs, and financial penalties to address and rectify hazardous waste management practices.

[\(Alameda DA Office\) \(Teslarati\)](#)



O'Reilly Auto Parts (2016):

- **Settlement:** \$9.86 million
- **Violations:** Improper storage, handling, and disposal of hazardous waste.
- **Outcome:** Significant financial penalties and requirements to overhaul hazardous waste management practices

[CollisionWeek](#)



AutoNation (2018):

- **Settlement:** \$3.38 million
- **Violations:** Environmental and consumer protection violations.
- **Outcome:** Similar to a leading Collision Repairer, AutoNation faced substantial fines and was required to implement corrective measures

[CollisionWeek](#)



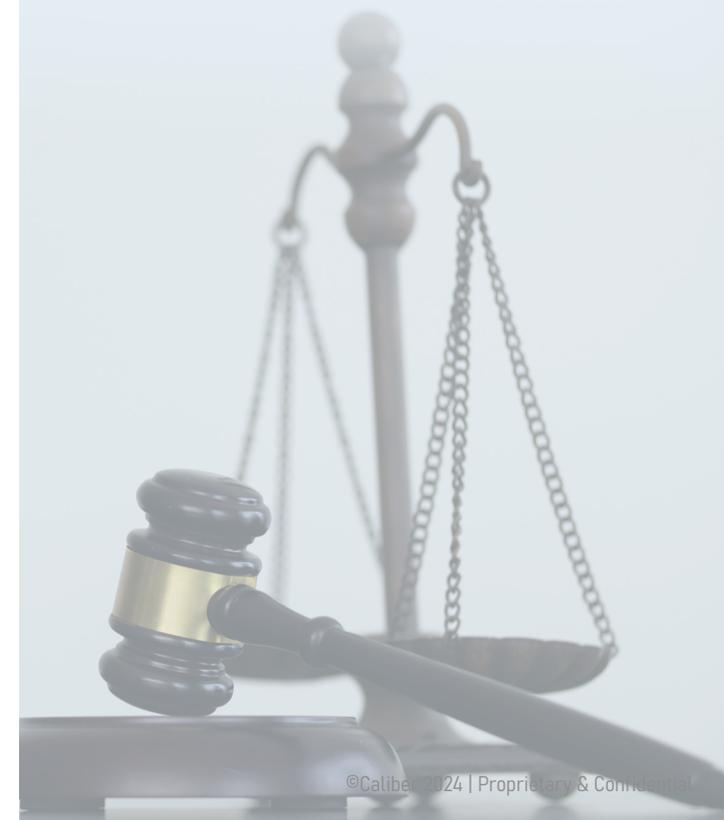
Walmart (2010):

- **Settlement:** Civil lawsuits in California
- **Violations:** Hazardous waste storage, handling, and transportation practices.
- **Outcome:** Substantial fines and the implementation of improved hazardous waste management protocols across its facilities

[CollisionWeek](#)

Regulatory Lessons

These cases demonstrate that non-compliance with hazardous waste regulations can lead to severe financial and legal repercussions for companies in various industries, not just collision repair. It underscores the importance of adhering to regulatory standards to avoid similar outcomes.





For Insurance Carriers:

- **Know Your Partners:** Ensure you understand the compliance level of the collision repair shops you work with. Verify that they have appropriate environmental, health & safety plans and policies in place, which are updated on a regular basis.
- **Support Compliance:** Favor partnerships with collision repair shops that invest in compliance to protect mutual customers and communities.
- **Encourage Improvement:** Work with non-compliant shops to improve their hazardous waste management practices.

For Collision Repair Shops:

- **Assess Your Practices:** Regular review of your hazardous waste management processes by experts to ensure compliance.
- **Invest in Training and Infrastructure:** Allocate resources for staff training and proper waste management infrastructure.
- **Stay Informed:** Keep up to date with federal and state regulations to avoid penalties and protect your business reputation.

The management of hazardous waste in the collision repair industry is a critical aspect of environmental protection and public health. Compliance with federal and state regulations is essential to avoid severe financial penalties, legal actions, and reputational damage. Both collision repair shops and insurance companies must prioritize adherence to these regulations to ensure safe and sustainable operations. The leading Collision Repairer case exemplifies the risks and costs associated with non-compliance, highlighting the importance of ongoing vigilance and investment in proper hazardous waste management practices.



Appendix: Sources

- [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#)
- [California Department of Toxic Substances Control \(DTSC\)](#)
- [California Code of Regulations \(CCR\), Title 22](#)
- [California Air Resources Board \(CARB\)](#)
- [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality \(TCEQ\)](#)
- [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\)](#)
- [Ohio Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#)
- [CollisionWeek Article on a leading Collision Repairer](#)
- [Repairer Driven News Article on Hazardous Waste Management in Auto Body Shops](#)
- [Office of the Alameda County District Attorney](#)
- [Tesla settles hazardous waste lawsuit in California for \\$1.5 million](#)

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