

Under the Clean Waters Act 1970, it is an offence to store material in such a way that there is the potential for water pollution to occur.

Environmental Legislation - Clean Waters Act 1970

It is against the law to place any material in a position that would allow it to flow into local waterways and cause pollution. Leaving pollutants in such a spot is the same as actually placing the substance directly into the waterway. You could be fined!

As the occupier of industrial or commercial premises, you are legally responsible for any pollution that occurs, irrespective of whether it was caused by one of your employees or a subcontractor working temporarily on your site.

Since mid 1995 both the EPA and local council officers have been able to issue \$600 on-the-spot fines for minor incidents that cause water pollution. In more serious cases, legal proceedings can be brought against the business.

So what can you do?

One way to improve the water quality in our waterways is to prevent contamination of the stormwater system. Here are a few ideas on how you can help.



Washing activities

When doing any kind of washing, the runoff water must not enter any stormwater drains. Cleaning and washing activities - including washing cars, equipment or work floors - should be confined to a bunded area, from which wastewater is directed to a collection pit and then to sewer (with the approval of Sydney Water), or is treated and even recycled by the use of water treatment equipment. Wash waters should not go into the stormwater!

Housekeeping

Maintaining clean premises, especially in the workshop and storage areas, will help prevent pollution of the stormwater system. For example, oils, greases, paint residue, solvents and other materials - including sand and sediment - should be cleaned up from around your premises. Your customers and staff will also appreciate a clean and tidy work area.

Storage areas

If you have bulk storage of liquids on your premises (including substances such as oil, paint, sand, soil, chemicals or liquid wastes) you should:

- locate storage areas away from stormwater drains
- provide bunding around the perimeter of liquid storage areas, including drums or tanks, to contain any leaks and spills
- store dry, loose materials (such as sand, soil, coal, mulch or woodchip) that are outside under a roof and within a bunded area. For short term storage of these materials, keep them under plastic cover and/or use a temporary bund or filter (such as filter fencing, sandbags or hay bales) around the stockpile.
- sweep or vacuum around storage areas regularly.



Spills

Clean up leaks, drips and spills quickly with dry absorbent material and then dispose of the material correctly with other waste. It is important to keep cleanup equipment on site in the event of an accidental spill. (See Solutions to Pollution for Spills.)

If a spill causes or threatens to cause environmental harm, local council or the EPA should be notified as soon as possible so that any necessary remedial action can be undertaken.

Storage recommendations

Typical types of liquid found within many industrial and some commercial premises. They include the storage of liquids such as oils, solvents, fuels, acids and paints. Safety plans, codes and licences required by authorities administering relevant legislation, such as the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), Work Cover Authority and the NSW Fire Brigade.

A number of substances have been designated as Dangerous Goods, and their use and storage is controlled by the Dangerous Goods Regulation. Dangerous Goods are those substances that are classified under nine classes according to the NSW Dangerous Goods Act 1975. Most substances that come under these classes must be licensed. For more information regarding the storage of Dangerous Goods, contact the Work Cover Authority on (02) 9370 5000.



Where should liquids be stored?

One simple approach to ensure that your liquid storage area does not create a threat to the local environment is to store your liquids inside, at a location that will not cause stormwater pollution. Within your premises store your liquids away from stormwater drains. It is important to check your storage areas periodically to make sure that there are no leaks or spills.

If inside storage is not possible, liquid storage tanks and drums should be located in a covered and bunded area. This prevents any spills from contaminating the surrounding land or from entering stormwater drains.

What should you do if there is a spill?

For large scale hazardous spills contact the NSW Fire Brigade (000) immediately for help with cleanup operations.

For cleanup of small scale spills, consult the **Material Safety Data Sheets** (MSDS) for the chemicals involved in the spill. These data sheets provide relevant information for specific liquid types, and are available from chemical manufacturers and suppliers. The MSDS gives advice on handling, storage and cleanup procedures for liquid chemicals. Your workplace should keep copies of the MSDS for each product that is used.

The following general procedures are recommended in the event of small emergency spills:

- **Stop the spill:** Stop the source of the spill immediately, if it is safe to do so, in a way that is appropriate to the chemicals involved. This will reduce the level of possible contamination to the environment.
- **Contain the spill:** Control the flow of the spill and contain the spill appropriate to the type of liquid involved. (Refer to the Material Safety Data Sheet.) Prevent the spill from entering any stormwater drains, by isolating drain inlets.
- **Clean up the spill:** Clean up the spill by referring to the Material Safety Data Sheets for the type of chemical involved. Cleaning up a spill promptly will help to protect the local environment.

It is important to clean up all spills quickly - even small ones such as oil spills, as these can easily flow into stormwater drains or be washed there by rain.

Should you have a 'Spill Cleanup Plan'?

It is advisable that your workplace develops a spill cleanup plan so that staff can be trained about cleanup procedures. Such a plan could be a simple one that indicates what staff members should do in the event of a spill.

In order for cleanup efforts to proceed successfully it is a good idea to store cleanup material (for example brooms, mops and absorbent material) in an accessible location within the workplace. The whereabouts of these items should also be included in your spill cleanup plan.

What is 'dry cleaning'?

Dry cleaning is a term used to describe any process of cleaning up spills without the use of water. It involves using absorbent materials such as rags, sawdust or even kitty litter to mop up liquid spills. There are many commercial products on the market

that promote this absorbent cleaning method. Dry cleaning methods not only reduce the potential for contaminated material to be hosed into the stormwater system, but also reduce the use of our valuable and scarce water resource.

Is stormwater pollution really a problem?

You may think that the small amount of pollution from your business will have little effect on water quality, but with five million people living in Sydney and thousands of commercial and industrial premises, stormwater pollution is now the biggest source of water pollution in urban areas. For example, every year in Sydney:

- 3,000 tonnes of litter ends up in Sydney Harbour
- 60,000 litres of oil drop on to Sydney's roads and are washed down the stormwater drains after rainstorms
- tens of thousands of tonnes of dirt or sediment are washed into the drains
- Smokers discard almost seven billion cigarette butts, of which around two billion are estimated to end up in our waterways.

