



Light industry program fact sheet

Spill management

Light industrial premises often contain materials which are potentially harmful to the environment. The risk depends on the volume of the spill, the nature of the material and the timeliness and effectiveness of the spill management practices. The four key aspects to spill management are prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Having plans and practices in place can greatly reduce the chance of a spill, as well as minimising the impact if a spill occurs.

Preventing spills

The first step in appropriate spill management is understanding why spills happen and taking action to avoid them. Spills of materials at a premises can result from incidents and activities including:

- equipment malfunction
- operating accidents
- employee negligence
- fires
- inadequate prevention processes
- natural events such as storms and flood
- vandalism and unauthorised access.



Common activities that may result in spills include:

- oil or coolant leaks from vehicles or machinery under service or repair coupled with inadequate spill capture measures, such as a lack of drip trays
- inadequate safeguards when moving hazardous materials onsite
- unsecured storage of harmful materials, such as in uncovered or unbunded sites
- industrial process water leaking from cooling units.

Spills can enter the environment through:

- unsealed on-site soak wells which allow discharges to move through soils into groundwater systems.
- on-site stormwater drains connected to off-site systems, such as piped or open drains, allowing waste discharges to flow into rivers or wetlands, which can affect plants and wildlife.
- contaminants discharged into unsealed ground, which can migrate into the soil and lead to site contamination issues and groundwater impacts.

Measures to avoid spills

Prevent spills by implementing a range of controls and actions:

- Check arriving machinery for leaks and use a drip tray to contain them.
- Conduct all servicing and repair work in sealed, banded areas.

- Clearly mark soak wells and stormwater entry points onsite so they are not used for waste disposal and can be quickly and easily identified in the event of a spill.
- Store all materials appropriately – refer to [Light industry fact sheet - Storage](#).

Preparation for spills

An important aspect of spill management is being prepared in case of a spill. This involves having appropriate plans, resources and equipment in place and ensuring staff are adequately trained.

Spill management plans

Spill management plans identify potentially harmful products on premises and detail methods for management, clean up and disposal in the event of a spill.

Further information on how to prepare a spill management plan can be found on the department's website [WQPN 10: Contaminant spills – emergency response plan](#).

Training and staff awareness

It is important to train staff on both preventing spills and appropriately responding if a spill occurs. Training needs to ensure staff are aware of spill management plans and where equipment and resources are located to quickly respond to a spill.

Access to resources and equipment

Ensure readiness to respond to a spill by having appropriate resources and equipment on the premises:

- Keep suitably stocked spill response equipment and train staff in its use.
- Make sure spill kits, drain blockers and other emergency clean-up equipment are located close to where discharges may occur.
- Keep accurate site drainage plans. This includes pit and soak well locations and drainage pipe routes.
- Access to information about materials such as safety data sheets.



Response to a spill

A quick response to a spill can greatly minimise the impact and exposure of the discharge to the environment. If a spill occurs, implement the spill management plan.

The initial step in responding to a spill is containing it, which will depend on:

- the substance discharged
- the volume of the spill
- the likely pathway
- the potential risk to people, the environment and property.



Cleaning up a spill

Following the containment of a spill, undertake remediation of the area. A site audit needs to be conducted following the clean up to ensure no residual contamination remains. Furthermore, a post-incident review should be held to identify why the spill occurred and actions and measures which can be implemented to avoid or minimise the possibility of future incidents.



Appropriately store and dispose of all waste generated by the spill clean-up [Light industry fact sheet - Wastewater](#) for further guidance.

If a spill involves a substance that is listed in Schedule 1 of the [Environmental Protection \(Controlled Waste\) Regulations 2004](#) then it will need special measures. Operators will be required to engage a licensed controlled waste contractor to dispose of controlled waste and retain controlled waste disposal receipts. For more information, please refer to the controlled waste fact sheet: [Requirements of waste holders](#).

Reporting a spill

Under section 72 of the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#), occupiers of premises must report discharges of waste likely to cause pollution or environmental harm to the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation as soon as practicable by calling the Environment Watch hotline on **1300 784 782**.

Further information about responsibilities under section

72 can be found here: [Duty to notify of waste discharge | Western Australian Government](#)



Consequences of a spill

The occupiers of a premises are responsible for clean-up costs associated with any spill, even if it was the result of an accident or equipment malfunction. Furthermore, if a site becomes contaminated due to the spill, it may affect the property value.

Under the [Environmental Protection \(Unauthorised Discharge\) Regulations 2004](#), it is an offence in the course of, or in connection with a business or a commercial activity, to cause or allow a material listed in Schedule 1 to be discharged into the environment.

Additionally the discharge of certain materials to the environment from a spill may be an offence under the [Environmental Protection Act 1986](#). Enforcement actions include a letter of warning, infringement or prosecution.