

If your day-to-day activities involve the washing of earthmoving equipment such as diggers, trucks, bulldozers or graders, you should consider the potential your activity has to pollute the environment.

What causes pollution?

Poor work practices while cleaning earthmoving equipment may be causing some of these common problems:

- Foamy dirty water flowing along the gutter into a stormwater sump
- Stains or coloured marks left on the ground, in gutters or on stormwater grates
- Washwater from degreasing engines and oily equipment flowing to a stormwater drain
- An oily sheen or rainwater run-off resulting in a layer of oil building up in a stormwater sump
- Silty, clay coloured water flowing to stormwater drains.

How your waste can pollute the environment

Any material or substance left uncovered or on the ground outside can flow or be washed by rainwater into a nearby stormwater drain where it will result in the pollution of the local stream and/or the coast.

Washwater that contains earth, detergents, degreasers, other cleaning agents and grime also contains a number of substances that can pollute our environment. These include phosphates, solvents, oils, silt, fuel residues, heavy metals, dirt and acids.

If discharged, these substances can cause harm to the environment by:

- Forming an oily layer on surface water and preventing oxygen and sunlight from entering the water, making it difficult for animals to breathe and find food and for plants to get energy
- Smothering small aquatic plants and animals and destroying where they live
- Poisoning animals and plants
- Irritating or clogging the gills of fish
- Building up chemicals in the bodies of plants and animals potentially causing long-term health effects.

Even a very small quantity of pollutant, or just one accidental discharge can drastically alter the quality of a stream. Fish, insects and plant life can be killed and their habitats destroyed. The stream can take many years to recover.



Photo 1: Water from cleaning earthmoving equipment must not enter the stormwater drains

You may think that your little bit of waste can't harm the environment but there are other people in the region carrying out activities similar to yours. Your waste when combined with that of others can amount to a significant amount of pollution occurring every day of the year. The cumulative effects of combined discharges can cause serious damage to our environment and must be prevented.

It is illegal to cause pollution

In New Zealand the Resource Management Act (1991) is the law that protects our environment. It clearly states that every person is responsible for ensuring that their activities and those of their employees do not contribute to pollution of our environment.

Specifically, it is illegal to allow any substance to enter water either directly, through the stormwater system or via the contamination of land without authorisation.

By making a few simple changes to your site and your daily practices you will be contributing to a pollution free environment for us all to enjoy both now and in the future.

Play it safe – stop pollution resulting from your activities

- Remove as much of the dirt as possible from the machinery before leaving the earthworks site
- Take the machine to a commercial wash bay that can cope with dirt-covered equipment or vehicles

- If washing equipment is an essential part of your business, have your own custom built wash area installed at your site with approval from your district council. The wash area will have to be specially designed to cope with the large amounts of dirt that can be washed off earthmoving machines
- Ensure that all silt traps are regularly cleaned out
- Ensure that all oil and grease traps are regularly maintained with the waste material being disposed of via a commercial waste contractor
- Caution: degreasing agents and detergents will carry oil through an oil interceptor into the receiving environment. Use degreasers carefully and sparingly.
- Dispose of all oily degreasing wastes and washwater containing cleaning agents via the sewerage system with the approval of your district council or via a commercial waste contractor.

Remember that whenever you wash something outside, the wastewater that is generated is a potential environmental pollutant.

**For further advice or information contact:
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Photo 2: Purpose-built wash areas are designed to cope with large volumes of dirty water