

MOBILE OPERATIONS

and vehicle recovery

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Straightforward advice to help vehicle repairers get ahead in today's business environment

Many mobile vehicle repair activities like engine and radiator repair, oil changes and valet services can harm the environment unless they are well managed.

This fact sheet sets out simple tips that will give you a business edge and protect the environment by good management of all liquid and solid waste from your vehicle recovery or mobile servicing, repairs or maintenance business.

It also introduces some environmentally sustainable ideas for doing business – like those used profitably by Urgent Couriers and other fleet managers.

See fact sheet:

- 2 for more on stormwater management best practices and vehicle washing
- 3 for more on hazardous substances storage and use
- 4 for more on spill control

MOBILE OPERATIONS

Typical mobile vehicle repairs include:

- vehicle servicing and maintenance
- parts cleaning
- radiator repair
- vehicle cleaning and valet services

Vehicle servicing and maintenance

Your standard business equipment needs to include the following items to protect soil, stormwater and groundwater from pollution:

- **a spill kit for emergencies**, containing:
 - absorbent material such as sand or kitty litter to soak up spilt oil and other liquids
 - a supply of plastic bags to hold used absorbent material for responsible disposal via the refuse collection or directly to your local landfill
 - bunds plus absorbent pillows and sausages to soak up larger spills and divert them away from stormwater grates
- **a system for cleaning greasy hands**, such as:
 - one of the waterless gels used in portable toilets
 - a bag for towels, rags or tissues
 - a storage container to collect oily water: this may be able to be disposed of into the oil-water separator at your local service station – with the owner's agreement
- **waste liquid containers**: keep a set of separate and clearly labelled containers in which to collect all waste liquids including fuels, brake and radiator fluids etc. You can dispose of them at a licensed trade waste collection centre – ask your city or district council about this



- **oil filter collection container:** drain all oil filters into a waste liquid container and put the drained filters into another container for disposal via a filter recycler. Only put oil or fuel filters in your regular waste bins if there really is no other local option
- **ground sheet or portable bund:** put a waterproof groundsheet or portable bund under the vehicle, with the edges raised to stop drips or spills getting on the ground. Sweep or mop up after every use, with the cleanings put in a container for safe disposal. This will mean you always have a clean surface to work on while your customers will be pleased to see you leave no puddles or stains on their driveway, lawn or gutter
- **drip trays or spill-proof trays:** always use a drip tray when working on radiator, brake and oil systems. Spill-proof trays that won't spill liquid even if you accidentally kick them, are becoming available from some automotive parts and accessory suppliers
- **a properly equipped home base:** every mobile mechanic should have a properly equipped garage where you can safely degrease engines, dispose of wastewater, oil filters and other parts. See fact sheet 11 for more
- **keep your van tidy:** a clean and tidy mobile unit reduces the risk of a spill or accident. Stow all liquids securely and set up a secure and accessible storage system for all your environmental equipment – they are as much a tool of your trade as your other tools

Engine repair and maintenance

- use a waterproof groundsheet, portable bund or other waste container when doing any maintenance or repair work. Always use something big enough to contain the whole vehicle component or system you are working on
- sweep or mop up and put the cleanings in a container for safe disposal, so as to protect soil and stormwater
- use a waste oil collection tray to avoid spillage when changing oil, or consider using a liquid vacuum fluid removal system – these avoid double handling as well as potential spillages

Cleaning parts

- collect all wastewater and other liquids from cleaning parts in a sealable container for disposal via a reputable waste contractor (see fact sheet 3)

- prevent liquid wastes from spilling, flowing or draining on to the ground or into a gutter
- wherever practicable, use non-solvent based cleaning systems – they are much safer for you, your staff and the environment

Radiator repairs

- collect all radiator fluids and other associated waste liquids and store them in appropriate enclosed containers
- recycle or dispose of them via a reputable waste contractor or to the sewer with approval from your local city or district council or utility company

Mobile vehicle cleaning and valet services

Before you start any job, work out how you are going to dispose of the washwater. You can wash vehicles:

- on grass or unsealed ground where the washwater can soak in, if you can do so while keeping the footpath clear. If you have more than one or two vehicles to clean, make sure that the washwater does not saturate the ground and start to run off into the stormwater system
- on a driveway – but only if the water is able to drain to a garden or grassy area
- on a wash mat with raised sides or on a portable bund to stop the washwater running into the gutter and stormwater system. Then use a small pump such as a boat bilge pump to direct the washwater into the sanitary sewer via the gully trap, onto the grass, or into a storage tank for transport and disposal to the sewer

Other practical tips for mobile vehicle cleaning:

- put a groundsheet or other protective cover on the ground before spraying the vehicle with polish or cleaning oily surfaces and engines
- always use the smallest possible amounts of soap, detergent and polish
- use a trigger hose to reduce the amount of water you use
- dispose of vacuum cleaner waste into a bin for landfill disposal
- keep your empty detergent and other containers for reuse or recycling

Jobs to avoid

Some jobs have a high environmental risk and are best carried out in an automotive repair workshop, including:

- engine reconditioning involving the removal of the engine and transmission

- extensive work to the differential and other major running gear items
- degreasing, cleaning or steaming an engine or engine bay

FIND OUT MORE FROM:

- your city, district or regional council

VEHICLE RECOVERY

What you need to know about pollution prevention when recovering vehicles

Spills from vehicle accidents are common on New Zealand roads, releasing things like diesel, petrol, engine oil, transmission and radiator fluids. Accidents involving tankers, fuel delivery trucks and other big haulers may pose significant environmental risk.

Depending on the nature and size of the accident and the resulting spill and any potential threat to public health, safety, or the environment, representatives from a number of organizations such as the Fire Service, NZ Police and the city, district or regional council should be notified immediately.

For large spills the Fire Service and regional council will generally co-ordinate spill containment and clean up. If you are first on the scene to a large spill, call the Fire Service immediately on 111.

For small spills and accident debris, whoever is responsible for the release or for removing the vehicle from the road is legally obliged to clean up the spill.

To prevent pollution from your vehicle recovery activities:

- always carry a spill kit to clean up fuel, oil and other fluids from the road. See fact sheet 4 for more on spill control. The spill kit should contain:
 - absorbent material such as sand, kitty litter or pads to soak up spilt oil and other liquids
 - a supply of plastic bags to hold used absorbent material for responsible disposal via the refuse collection or directly to the landfill
 - bunds plus absorbent pillows and sausages to soak up larger spills and divert them away from stormwater grates
- sweep the road clear of any accident debris such as glass and plastic. Bag the debris and dispose of it correctly to a refuse bin

- control all fluid leaks before transporting vehicles or storing them at your depot
- carry a temporary sealing compound such as Plug’N’Dike that will form an immediate seal to control flammable and/or hazardous leaks and spills from fuel tanks or other fluid reservoirs

BEYOND COMPLIANCE – TAKING A BIGGER STEP TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Like other businesses that involve a lot of driving, mobile operators and vehicle recovery firms can choose to do more for the environment. Why not try out some of the ideas below?

- green your vehicle or your whole fleet and save money, too! Go to www.greenfleet.org.nz/home.asp to join the Greenfleet programme, and to www.urgent.co.nz/ to see the benefits that Urgent Couriers found from joining up. Endorsed by, among others, Honda and Toyota, Greenfleet helps you to follow three steps to help the environment:
 - step 1: be transport efficient
 - step 2: support alternative fuels and vehicles
 - step 3: offset the impacts of your vehicle
- green your office: save money on power, water and materials by using the free guide available from www.greenoffice.org.nz/
- download the Enterprise³ guide for more ways that small and medium sized enterprises can adopt better business practices to make a positive difference for the environment and society, while at the same time improving their overall business performance. Go to the Ministry for the Environment website www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/sus-dev/enterprise3-triple-bottom-line-guide-jun03.html
- tell your customers about the benefits you gain – they may want to try out these ideas too!

FIND OUT MORE FROM:

- your local, district or regional council
- the Yellow Pages under ‘Automotive parts’, ‘Environmental products and supplies’ and ‘Pollution control’

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