

# Old vehicle parts and used batteries

If your day-to-day activities involve the collection and storage of used parts and old vehicle batteries, then before you begin you must consider the effects your activity may have on the environment.

## What sort of things cause pollution?

Poor work practices at your site while replacing mechanical parts such as differentials or gearboxes and exchanging car batteries may be causing some of these common problems:

- Oil stained concrete or earth around work areas.
- A messy parts storage area where fluid leaks and spills have occurred while parts have been left stacked in the yard.
- An oily sheen visible on rainwater run-off from areas used to store parts contaminating stormwater.
- Old and broken batteries stacked in the open which can cause acid and lead to leak out of them into the ground.

## How can waste pollute the environment?

Any material or substance that is left uncovered or outside can be washed by rainwater into a nearby stormwater drain. This will result in the pollution of the local stream, harbour or groundwater resource.

Oil can partially dissolve in water introducing toxic substances into the environment. These include heavy metals such as lead and chromium and hydrocarbon compounds that are a by-product of vehicle operation.

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

- Allow oil, lead and acid from leaking batteries to seep into the land and underlying groundwater;
- Poison animals and plants;
- Form an oily layer or film on surface water, preventing oxygen and sunlight from entering the water. This makes it difficult for animals to breathe and find food, and prevents plants to get energy; and
- Some chemicals can build up in the bodies of plants and animals potentially causing long-term health effects.

It is important to realise that even a small quantity of a pollutant, or just one accidental discharge can drastically alter the quality of a stream. Fish, insects and plant life can be killed, habitats destroyed and the stream can take up to ten years to recover.



Many parts removed from old vehicles can potentially affect the environment



You may think that your little bit of waste can't harm the environment. However, there are many other people in the region carrying out activities similar to yours. Your waste when combined with that of many others can amount to a significant amount of pollution occurring every day. It is the cumulative effects of this combined discharge that causes 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 unless a resource consent has been issued for this discharge.

It is also illegal to bury vehicles or parts.

By making a few simple changes to your site and 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 – you can help stop pollution

- Clean parts of your yard that are dirty and oily. Block off access to all stormwater drains on your site and use an appropriate cleaning agent to scrub back to a clean surface. Capture the wash down and dispose of it as waste water. Then you will be able to see spills and leaks as they occur and prevent them from causing pollution.
- If possible, store all disused parts and batteries undercover on a paved or sealed surface.
- Always drain all fluids from old parts and dispose of them properly.
- Store all waste oil and other liquids in a covered bunded area. If possible, designate a reliable staff member to drain off the clean stormwater that accumulates in the bunded area.
- If oil must be stored outside, keep lids and caps on robust containers and use a secure area to avoid vandalism.
- Store acid carefully in sealed, corrosion proof containers and regularly disposed of it via a commercial waste contractor.
- Clean up all spilt material immediately and dispose of wastes into leak-proof bin.
- Never burn parts or wastes from vehicles.

### Always have a good spill contingency plan with equipment handy and your staff well trained

Batteries and waste oil can be recycled. Drop them at a transfer station or arrange for collection by a recycler. The Northland Regional Council can assist your company in developing a contingency plan or provide advice on these matters. Contact the Regional Council on 0800 002 004 and ask to speak to a member of the Waste Management Team.

**Report pollution to the  
24/7 Environmental Hotline  
0800 504 639**



Acid and lead can leak from batteries