

## Degreasers and Detergents

Degreasers and detergents are commonly used in automotive businesses for degreasing engines and washing the exterior of vehicles. The chemicals used can sometimes cause harm to the environment. It is important that businesses check what sort of degreasers and detergents they are using and if they are not using them already, switch to biodegradable, quick break, phosphate free cleaning products. It is also important that any wastewater or washwater containing these chemicals is disposed of properly.

### Preventing water pollution

All runoff from vehicles; detergents, degreasers, oil and grease needs to be pre-treated before it is discharged to the sewer. Runoff from vehicles cannot be allowed into stormwater drains or onto soil where it can seep to the waterways.

By using biodegradable, quick break degreasers and biodegradable, phosphorus free detergents the pre-treatment process is made more effective. These chemicals allow oil water separators to operate at maximum efficiency and reduce the amount of oil in the wastewater that is discharged to the sewer.

**CONSIDER:** Your water authority grants your business the ability to discharge its treated wastewater into the sewer system as long as the wastewater being discharged is of a certain quality. If your business uses solvent-based chemicals the wastewater is more likely to breach the accepted levels.

### Degreasers

#### ▪ **Biodegradable**

Biodegradable chemicals have the ability to be broken down by living organisms into its basic components. The standard for biodegradability is set by the Australian Standard AS 4351.1-1996. To be labelled as "biodegradable" a product is required, by the Australian Standard, to degrade 80% within 21 days.

There are different levels of biodegradability; all chemicals are technically biodegradable but may take hundreds of years to do so. Use degreasers that meet the Australian Standard of biodegradability.

#### ▪ **Quick break**

Quick break chemicals have the ability to quickly separate oil components from water components that are mixed together. This allows any oil water separator to more efficiently separate the oil from water so that oil is not passed through and discharged into the sewer with the wastewater.

By using quick break chemicals, separators are allowed to operate more efficiently and produce a better result.

**CONSIDER:** All wastewater containing any degreaser must be directed to an oil water separator.

For more information on oil water separators, please see the environmental information guide; "Oil Water Separators".

## Detergents

### ▪ Biodegradable

Biodegradable chemicals have the ability to be broken down by living organisms into its basic components. The standard for biodegradability is set by the Australian Standard AS 4351.1-1996. To be labelled as "biodegradable" a product is required, by the Australian Standard, to degrade 80% within 21 days.

There are different levels of biodegradability; all chemicals are technically biodegradable but may take hundreds of years to do so. Use detergents that meet the Australian Standard of biodegradability.

### ▪ Phosphate free

If phosphate reaches waterways it can cause excessive plant growth and algal bloom. Phosphate needs to be kept out of our water systems, and this can be achieved by using phosphate free detergent.

Phosphate is a powerful cleaning agent, so when it is taken out it is replaced by other strong chemicals. For this reason, no detergents should be allowed into the stormwater system.

**CONSIDER:** All wastewater containing any detergent must be directed to an oil water separator.

For more information on oil water separators, please see the environmental information guide; "Oil Water Separators".

## Checking your chemicals

The properties of the chemicals being used can be checked on the relevant Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). MSDS are information sheets relating to chemicals used in the workplace which contain important information in regards to composition and health and safety issues. Most MSDS will have information on the biodegradability and quick break properties of the chemicals. If the information is not available on the MSDS, contact the supplier directly for more information.

**CONSIDER:** It is the employer's responsibility that the MSDS for every chemical are easily accessible for every employee. This is a WorkCover requirement.

For more information on MSDS, please see the environmental information guide; "Material Safety Data Sheets".

## Key contacts

### MTA NSW

02 9213 4222

[www.greenstamp.mtansw.com.au](http://www.greenstamp.mtansw.com.au)

### ACTewAGL (ACT)

13 11 93

[www.actewagl.com.au](http://www.actewagl.com.au)

### Department of Environment & Climate Change (NSW)

131 555

[www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)

### Emergency Services

000

### Hunter Water (NSW)

1300 657 657

[www.hunterwater.com.au](http://www.hunterwater.com.au)

### Local Council Contacts (NSW)

[www.dlg.nsw.gov.au](http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au)

### Sydney Water (NSW)

13 20 92

[www.sydneywater.com.au](http://www.sydneywater.com.au)

### Territory & Municipal Services (ACT)

13 22 81

[www.tams.act.gov.au](http://www.tams.act.gov.au)

### WorkCover (ACT)

02 6205 0200

[www.workcover.act.gov.au](http://www.workcover.act.gov.au)

### WorkCover (NSW)

13 10 50

[www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

#### Important Disclaimer

These Information Guides have been developed to assist MTA NSW and MTA ACT members to better manage their environmental impacts. However it remains the responsibility of the individual business to determine the extent to which various laws and best practice guidelines apply to them and to take appropriate steps to achieve compliance. Though every possible effort has been made, MTA NSW accepts no responsibility for the accuracy of the information.