

How to clean up an oil spill on roads or hard surfaces

Once a spill has reached soil or any broken ground, the control, containment and clean up of the spill often becomes more difficult than it would be on a hard surface. It is important therefore, to try and contain the spill to the road, carpark or hard surface.

The clean up procedures described in these notes are for minor spills (few litres) to medium spills (1500 litres) of oil or fuel. In the event of a major spill onto soil, a different technique may be more appropriate.

The three basic steps of a spill clean up are:

1. Control the spill
2. Contain the spill
3. Clean up the spill

Firstly, before attempting any spill clean up, ensure the area is safe to enter. Ensure traffic can not enter the area and that the spill crew can work safely. Be aware of fumes and approach the spill site from upwind. Always ensure personal protection equipment is worn.

CONTROL:

Stop the source of the spill. For example, upright the drum or stop the pump, turn off all ignition sources and locate the drains.

CONTAIN:

Use absorbent booms, banks of soil, hoses or any safe objects to surround and prevent the spill from further impacting the environment. Often with a spill onto a hard surface, the liquid will travel very quickly in the initial few moments. Prevent the spill from entering drains and culverts. Drains often lead to the broader environment and can create larger problems. Dangerous fumes can also build up in low lying areas.

CLEAN UP:

Large pools of spilled liquid should be recovered with absorbent pillows and pads. The remaining spill should be covered with a layer of ground absorbent / floorsweep, which is used to absorb any free liquid and prevent vehicles skidding. Global Peat is an absorbent recommended for this task as it absorbs hydrocarbons, even in wet conditions. If the spill is not hydrocarbon-based, use ProSORB, BudgetSORB or Zeolite. These absorbents are swept into the spill with brooms or a road sweeper. All absorbent materials should be reclaimed and disposed of in accordance with local regulations.

Often sand is used for spill clean up but we do not recommend this unless you have no other alternative available. Sand may release the spilled liquid if it comes in contact with water (rain or running water). Also, much larger quantities of sand must be used (compared to an organic absorbent) to absorb a similar-sized spill. This can lead to expensive disposal costs. Sand may also release the spill within the landfill area, whereas organic absorbents usually do not.

