Toolbox talk

Pollution and spills

Keep fuel, oil, concrete and silt out of drains and water

10 minutes

For: Everyone on site, especially anyone handling fuel, oil, concrete or pumping water

Why it matters

Fuel, oil, concrete wash water and muddy water can harm wildlife, rivers and groundwater. Causing pollution can be a criminal offence and lead to fines, prosecution and clean-up costs. Detailed rules differ between UK nations.

Key points

1. Surface water drains go straight to rivers and streams. Only clean rainwater should ever go down them.
2. Learn the drain covers: blue usually means surface water, red means foul water, and a red 'C' means combined.
3. Store fuel and oil in a bund or on a drip tray, away from drains, gullies and watercourses.
4. Refuel plant only in the agreed area, using a bunded bowser, a funnel and a spill kit close by.
5. Drip trays catch small leaks, not big spills. Empty them regularly so they have room to work.
6. Wash out concrete mixers only in the dedicated washout area. Concrete slurry must never reach drains or water.
7. Use an approved treatment and disposal route for silty water. Settlement alone does not authorise discharge; obtain any required permit or consent.
8. If a spill reaches a drain, water or soaks into the ground, report it straight away.

Scan for the latest version of this talk online ›

Go further: NetRegs: Working on construction and demolition sites (GPP6)

Sources: GOV.UK: Pollution prevention for businesses; GOV.UK: Report an environmental incident; NetRegs: Refuelling on construction sites; NetRegs: Drip trays to prevent spills on site.

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/pollution-spills**

Pollution and spills

Do

- Know where the spill kits are and how to use them.
- Check hoses, tanks and plant for leaks before you start.
- Keep lids on containers and label what's inside.
- Lock fuel tanks and bowsers when they're not in use.
- Tell your supervisor about every spill, however small.

Don't

- Don't pour anything down a surface water drain.
- Don't leave a refuel unattended or overfill a tank.
- Don't wash out mixers, tools or paint near drains or water.
- Don't hose a spill away. Contain it and soak it up.
- Don't put used spill pads in the general skip. They may be hazardous waste.

Ask the group

- Where are the nearest drains, and which are surface water?
- Where are our spill kits, and when were they last checked?
- Where do we wash out concrete and tools on this site?
- Who do we call if a spill gets into a drain or stream?

If it goes wrong: Stop the source only if safe. Contain the spill, protect drains and tell your supervisor. Report pollution promptly: England/NI 0800 80 70 60; Wales 0300 065 3000. In Scotland report online to SEPA; its 0800 80 70 60 line is staffed Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm. Call 999 for immediate danger to life.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____ Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

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Attendance register

Pollution and spills

Site / project _____ Date and time _____

Presented by _____ Company _____

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
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8			
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10			
11			
12			
13			
14			

By signing, attendees confirm they took part in this toolbox talk and understood the key points. Keep this record with your site safety file.

Presenter signature _____ Follow-up actions _____

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Quick check

Pollution and spills

Tick one answer for each question. Your presenter has the answers.

Name _____ Date _____

1. Where does a surface water drain usually go?

- [ ] To the sewage works
- [ ] Straight to a river or stream
- [ ] Nowhere, it's a soakaway

2. What colour is a surface water drain cover usually marked?

- [ ] Red
- [ ] Blue
- [ ] Yellow

3. Where should you wash out a concrete mixer?

- [ ] Into the nearest drain
- [ ] Only in the dedicated washout area
- [ ] On the grass verge

4. A drip tray is full of rainwater with an oily sheen. What do you do?

- [ ] Tip it on the ground
- [ ] Soak up the oil with pads and dispose of them properly
- [ ] Leave it

5. Oil from a spill has reached a stream in England. What should happen?

- [ ] Wait and see if it clears
- [ ] Report it to the Environment Agency hotline straight away
- [ ] Hose it downstream

For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. Straight to a river or stream

Surface water drains discharge directly to the environment, so only clean water should go into them.

2. Blue

Blue marks surface water. Red is foul water, and a red 'C' is a combined system.

3. Only in the dedicated washout area

Concrete slurry is a pollutant. Wash out only where run-off is captured.

4. Soak up the oil with pads and dispose of them properly

A sheen means oil. Use absorbent pads, which may need disposing of as hazardous waste.

5. Report it to the Environment Agency hotline straight away

Report pollution of water or land immediately. The 24-hour hotline is 0800 80 70 60.

Sources

- GOV.UK: Pollution prevention for businesses
  https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses
- GOV.UK: Report an environmental incident
  https://www.gov.uk/report-environmental-problem
- NetRegs: Refuelling on construction sites
  https://www.netregs.org.uk/environmental-topics/materials-fuels-and-equipment/materials-and-equipment-used-on-construction-sites/refueling-on-construction-sites/
- NetRegs: Drip trays to prevent spills on site
  https://www.netregs.org.uk/environmental-topics/water/control-of-water-pollution-from-construction-sites/drip-trays-to-prevent-spills-on-site/

> **Presenting tips:** keep it to about 10 minutes, use real examples from your site, ask the group questions rather than reading everything out, and record attendance on the register.

Only rain down the drain.

1. **Fuel and oil in a bund**
2. **Spill kit close to hand**
3. **Report every spill**

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Sources and qualifications

Pollution and spills

Scope: environmental duties and record periods quoted here are for England unless otherwise identified. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate rules and regulators. Use the rules for the site location.

A4 applicability: no installation-design requirement is asserted in this talk. Its claims are referenced to the subject-specific sources below.

S1. Environment Agency: Pollution prevention (England)

Pollutants, drains and cover colour code, storage/bunding, spill controls and consent/permit for disposal; key points, Do/Don't and quiz.

https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pollution-prevention-for-businesses

S2. GOV.UK: Report water pollution (England)

English incident reporting route and contact; emergency box and quiz 5.

https://www.gov.uk/report-water-pollution

S3. mygov.scot: Report an environmental incident

SEPA online reporting and telephone service hours; emergency box.

https://www.mygov.scot/report-environmental-incident

S4. Natural Resources Wales: Report an incident

Welsh incident reporting contact; emergency box.

https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/contact-us/report-an-incident/?lang=en

S5. nidirect: Report polluted land and water

Northern Ireland pollution reporting contact; emergency box.

https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/report-polluted-land-and-water