

# Roadway Vehicle Fluid Spills

Guidance on Management and Disposal Options



## Introduction

Accidents involving vehicles can result in vehicle liquids being released to the environment. Typical vehicle accident fluid spills include antifreeze, engine oil, brake fluid, hydraulic fluid, diesel fuel and gasoline. These liquids need to be properly managed to protect Wisconsin's environment and to stay in compliance with environmental laws. The sections below outline management options for vehicle liquids and the absorbents used to contain these liquids, providing the materials are cleaned up immediately from the site, containerized and transported to an appropriate facility.

This document does not apply to roadside vehicle/truck cargo spills of chemical products, hazardous wastes, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) or other hazardous substances. These spills require immediate contact with the DNR through the Spills Hotline.

**Wisconsin's 24-Hour  
Emergency Hotline  
1-800-943-0003**

## Management of absorbent materials

Clean-up of spills typically involves spreading a granular absorbent (e.g., sand, oil-dry, cat litter) that not only absorbs the liquid, but also assists in the mitigation of reducing the slickness of the road surface caused by the spilled liquid. The used absorbent is typically swept up and put in a garbage bag or container and removed from the scene by either the local first responders or the tow truck driver (on behalf of the vehicle owner).

The DNR recommends contacting the landfill prior to transporting to confirm they will accept these wastes.

Fluid	Absorbent Management Methods	Notes
Diesel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burn for energy recovery in specific units<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Disposal at landfill<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	Diesel fuel recovered from a spill are fuels, so they are not regulated as hazardous waste when burned for energy recovery. s. NR 661.0002(3)(b)2., Wis. Adm. Code.
Gasoline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burn for energy recovery in specific units<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Disposal at landfill<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	Gasoline recovered from a spill are fuels, so they are not regulated as hazardous waste when burned for energy recovery. s. NR 661.0002(3)(b)2., Wis. Adm. Code.
Antifreeze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disposal at landfill<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	Recommend that bentonite clay absorbents be used rather than spill pad, as bentonite clay is much better at immobilizing any potential metals like lead that may be in the antifreeze or motor oil.
Motor oils: Engine oil, brake fluid, hydraulic fluid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burn for energy recovery in specific units<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Recover for reuse</li> <li>Disposal at landfill<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	Motor oil recovered from a spill may be able to be used as fuels, so they are not regulated as hazardous waste when burned for energy recovery or reused. ss. NR 661.0002(3)(b)2. & 679.10, Wis. Adm. Code.
Mixture of fluids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burn for energy recovery in specific units<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Disposal at landfill<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>	

<sup>1</sup> Specific burning units include industrial furnaces and boilers, utility boilers and hazardous waste incinerators

<sup>2</sup> If drained of free-flowing liquid

<sup>3</sup> Gasoline contains benzene and may not be suitable for disposal in a non-hazardous waste landfill

When removing the used absorbent from the accident scene, collect the materials in a leak-proof, compatible container in good condition, label it with a descriptive name (ex. "vehicle spill absorbents") and keep the container closed except when adding or removing waste.

If the used absorbent is collected and stored, and if the materials are determined to be hazardous wastes, the facility must follow hazardous waste regulations.

Tow truck companies:  
For insurance purposes, a waste determination may be needed prior to disposal.

Paint Filter Test

The Paint Filter test indicates whether the waste materials contain liquids (SW-846 Test Method 9095B). If a material passes the Paint Filter test it is an indication that there are no free liquids contained in the waste and the material can go to a licensed landfill for disposal as a solid waste.

## Management of Liquids

The recovery of fluids from the vehicle itself would typically be conducted at a vehicle repair shop or scrapyards and would be part of that facility's waste generation or product recovery. The table below outlines management options for liquids generated from vehicle accidents.

Material	Management Methods	Notes
Diesel, gasoline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use as Fuel</li> <li>Send off site for fuel blending</li> <li>Disposal</li> </ul>	Diesel fuel and gasoline recovered from a spill are fuels, so they are not regulated as hazardous waste when burned for energy recovery. s. NR 661.0002(3)(b)2., Wis Adm. Code
Antifreeze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reuse</li> <li>Send off site for fuel blending</li> <li>Disposal</li> </ul>	When legitimately reused, antifreeze would not be regulated as a solid or hazardous waste. s. NR 661.0002(5)(a)2., Wis. Adm. Code
Motor oils: Engine oil, brake fluid, hydraulic fluid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reuse</li> <li>Send off site for fuel blending</li> <li>Disposal</li> </ul>	When reused, motor oils would not be regulated as solid or hazardous waste. ss. NR 661.0002(5)(a)2. & 679.10, Wis. Adm. Code

## Resources and Contact Information

For more information including [publications, inspection forms, and administrative codes and statutes](#), go to [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov) and search "hazardous waste resources." Use the *Additional Resources* menu to navigate to specific topics. For staff contact information, go to the [staff directory](#), enter "hazardous waste requirements" in the subject field, and choose the appropriate county contact.

**Mailing address:** DNR Waste & Materials Management Program, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707  
**Email:** [DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRWasteMaterials@Wisconsin.gov)

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