

Safe at-home Vehicle Maintenance

Routine vehicle maintenance produces many hazardous wastes: oil and grease from engine parts, asbestos dust from brakes, zinc from tires, and organic compounds and metals from fuels. If not properly managed, these wastes pose a serious threat to the safety of drinking water supplies, human health, and the quality of the environment.

Unlike service stations and body shops, most home car repair sites are not equipped to properly dispose of these vehicle wastes. But there are steps that at-home mechanics can take to reduce the impact of their maintenance activities.

Whether servicing a car, snowmobile, lawnmower, or RV, the following tips will help the do-it-yourself mechanic prevent groundwater and stormwater contamination and protect drinking water sources for generations to come.

Location

- Conduct repairs in a covered location where rainwater cannot carry away exposed contaminants.
- Conduct repairs on a flat, solid surface so that spills and debris can be easily contained and swept up.
- Seal up any floor drains that lead directly into the ground in case of spills.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

- Reduce the amount of solvents and de-greasers used in your repairs; use just enough to do the job. Apply extra “elbow-grease” for tough jobs.
- Reuse rags to their capacity before disposal.
- Recycle motor oil, antifreeze, and other fluids. Most service stations accept these items for recycling or proper disposal.

Spills

- Use drip pans or plastic tarps under vehicles when you know there is a leak or if you are changing the fluids.
- Wipe up small spills with rags. Use kitty litter or sawdust to absorb larger spills. Sweep up the saturated material and dispose of properly.
- Have a spill kit ready that contains absorbent material (kitty litter, sawdust), personal protective gear (goggles, chemical-resistant gloves), a broom and plastic dust pan, and a phone number to call in case of a large spill.

Clean-up and Storage

- Sweep the garage floor or driveway rather than hosing it down.
- Store extra parts out of the reach of stormwater and in a container with sides to prevent oily drips
- Drain all fluids from stored or unusable cars on your property to prevent leaks. Dispose of fluids properly.
- Never dump motor oil or other automotive fluids on the ground, down a storm drain, or in a ditch.
- Store any leftover chemicals in a secondary container out of the reach of children or pets.

Contact the Muskegon Conservation District for more stormwater pollution prevention information. We are located at 940 N. Van Eyck St. Muskegon, MI 49442 or see us on the web at www.muskegoncd.org.