



Focus on Floor Drains and Generator Liability

FROM ECOLOGY'S HAZARDOUS WASTE AND TOXICS REDUCTION PROGRAM

Why is it a problem to put wastes and waste water into floor drains?

Many types of businesses use floor drains as an easy way to dispose of floor cleaning or other wastes. What many businesses don't realize is that putting wastes down floor drains may violate several laws, including the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, Washington State water pollution control laws, as well as state and federal hazardous waste regulations.

Many floor drains send untreated wastes directly to septic systems, dry wells, storm drains, pits or cesspools. When waste enters these types of drains it may also pass through directly to groundwater, or enter streams or lakes – it doesn't go to a sewage treatment plant. We rely on water resources for drinking, recreation and wildlife.

Only a sanitary sewer can effectively handle some of these wastes, while others should never enter a sanitary sewer at all. When property is sold, the finance company will require an environmental site assessment. Convenient disposal to floor drains today can lead to expensive clean up costs down the road when you try to sell your property.

What should you do?

1. Find out where your floor drains go. You can't tell just by looking, so you'll probably need some help to discover where your drains lead. Consider each floor drain separately and use these tips to help you find out where they go.
 - Do you get a sewer bill? If yes, then one or more of your floor drains may be connected to the sanitary sewer.
 - Call your city or county public works department or local sewer utility to ask for help in identifying where your drains lead. They may be able to run a safe, inexpensive dye test to help you find out. Contact the Washington Association of Sewer and Water Districts, (206) 246-1299 or (800) 244-0124, or online at <http://www.waswd.org/>
 - If your business was built before 1970, or if your business is located in a rural area, it is likely that your floor drains do not lead to a sanitary sewer.
2. If your floor drain is already connected to a sanitary sewer, you still need to meet local sewer discharge limits. All discharges to a sewer system must be authorized in writing by the Department of Ecology or your local sewer authority. You are probably meeting local sewer requirements, if you can answer "yes" to each of the following questions:
 - Do you have a list of discharge limits for various wastes issued by the sewer district?
 - Do you have written permission to discharge your particular waste?
 - Do you keep records on your compliance with such limits?

3. If your floor drain is not connected to a sanitary sewer, answer the following questions:
- Do you have knowledge of past or current practices in which hazardous substances, such as pesticides, inks, solvents, gasoline or oil were disposed of to this floor drain?
 - Are you concerned that past or current practices with this floor drain could have an adverse impact on human health or the environment?

If your answer is “yes” to either question, contact a toxics cleanup specialist at your nearest Ecology Regional Office (see numbers below). They will help you determine if you have a pollution problem from this floor drain. If your answer is “no,” then exercise either Option A or B below:

- A. Connect the floor drain to a sanitary sewer and meet sewer discharge limits (see #2. above), or
- B. Seal the floor drain and change your current practices. Once your drain is sealed off, you’ll need to change your waste management practices to do without it.

Many shops have found practical alternatives to using floor drains, including:

- Keeping the floors cleaner longer to minimize the need for floor cleaning
- Sweeping floors and spot mopping
- Building a “dead end” sump where occasional waste water can enter and evaporate naturally (eventually you will develop a sludge at the bottom that may need to be managed as hazardous waste)
- Investigating recirculating floor scrubbers or “closed-loop” wastewater recycling systems
- Considering evaporation and other available treatment-by-generator options
- Using improved housekeeping

Keep a record of your actions. If you seal off a floor drain, create a record of past uses for the drain, the date when the drain was sealed, and a description of the physical location of the drain before it was sealed. If your drain is connected to a sanitary sewer, keep records as described in #2, above.

Where can you go to get more information?

Request any of the following documents through Ecology’s Publication Office (360) 407-7472 or access them through Ecology’s Web page at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov>

- *Hazardous Waste Consideration in Real Estate Transactions*, #R-TC-92-115
- *Managing Hazardous Waste, A Guide for Automotive Repair Shops*, #92-BR-12
- *Domestic Sewage Exclusion* #94-136

Remember that your business is liable for all hazardous waste generated.

For more information on floor drains or if you are uncertain about your responsibilities, contact a hazardous waste specialist at your nearest Ecology Regional Office:

Central Regional Office, Yakima	(509) 575-2490
Eastern Regional Office, Spokane	(509) 329-3400
Northwest Regional Office, Bellevue	(425) 649-7000
Southwest Regional Office, Lacey	(360) 407-6300