

Hazardous Waste Factsheet

“Convenient disposal to floor drains today can lead to expensive clean-up costs later when you try to sell or refinance your property.”

Thurston County Public
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Floor Drains

The Problem

Many types of businesses use floor drains as an easy way to dispose of wastewater from cleaning activities or other wastes. What many business owners don't realize is that putting wastes down floor drains may violate the Thurston County Nonpoint Source Pollution Ordinance, and several other federal and state laws.

Many floor drains send untreated wastes directly to storm drains, septic systems, dry wells, pits, or ditches. When wastes enter these types of drains, they pass through soil and may enter groundwater, or may enter streams or lakes directly -- *they do not necessarily go to a wastewater treatment plant*. In addition, even a treatment plant cannot effectively remove some types of wastes.

When commercial property is sold or refinanced, finance companies often require an environmental site assessment that evaluates whether property is contaminated. Convenient disposal to floor drains today can lead to expensive clean-up costs later when you try to sell or refinance your property. Irresponsible disposal can also lead to contaminated drinking water that may affect your community and your family.

What You Can Do

Find out where your floor drains go. Consider each drain separately. Call your city or county public works department or local sewer utility and ask for help in identifying where your drains lead. If your business was built before 1970, or is located in a rural area, your floor drains most likely do not lead to a sanitary sewer.

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 by the LOTT Alliance. LOTT may be reached at (360) 644-2333.

Drains that are connected to the sanitary sewer through an oil/water separator have more pollutant removed from wastewater before reaching the sewer. As noted in associated fact sheet, oil/water separators lose their effectiveness when they are not maintained.

If your floor drain is not connected to a sanitary sewer, contact the Thurston County Business Pollution Prevention Program for help in determining if you have a pollution problem from this floor drain. Two options to consider for these floor drains are:

1. Connecting the drain to a sanitary sewer and getting a sewer discharge permit; or
2. Sealing the floor drain and changing your current disposal practices.

Practical tips to eliminate the use of and need for a floor drain:

1. Sweep and spot-mop floors frequently to minimize the need for complete floor cleaning. Improve general housekeeping practices.
2. Build a "dead-end" sump where occasional wastewater can collect and either evaporate or be pumped into a dedicated and labeled container. Sludge that may build up in the sump will need to be removed and possibly managed as hazardous waste.
3. If you must keep a floor drain, consider installing a re-circulating floor scrubber or "closed-loop" wastewater recycling system, or investigate other treatment-by-generator options.

Protect Your Drains

If your floor drains need to remain functional, there are several ways to protect drains from accidental leaks and spills of hazardous materials and wastes.

- Provide secondary containment for all materials in the immediate area around the drain. If adequate secondary containment is provided, risks that unnoticed spills can flow into the drain are greatly reduced.
- Make the drain inaccessible to potential spills by creating a liquid-tight barrier around the drain cover. A temporary drain plug can also be installed to prevent flow through the drain, except when the plug is removed.

Keep a Record of Your Actions

If you permanently seal off a floor drain, create a record of past uses for the drain, the date when the drain was sealed, and describe the physical location of the drain before it was sealed. Keep records of flow into any drains that are connected to a sanitary sewer to demonstrate that you have met discharge permit requirements.

Accurate information about the history of your drains may be important if the property is offered for sale, and it could be useful in reducing liability in the case of an investigation of contaminated soil or ground water.

Additional Information

Specialists from the Thurston County Business Pollution Prevention Program are available to answer questions about floor drains, best management practices for wastewater handling, treatment, and disposal, and many other hazardous waste related issues.

The Business Pollution Prevention program offers free, non-regulatory on-site technical assistance to local businesses. Please contact the Business Pollution Prevention Program at (360) 867-2664, Monday through Friday, TDD (360) 867-2603, or visit our website at www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehhw/index.html.