

Pollution Prevention Technical Information Note

Cleaning Wheeled Waste Containers

December 2011

We've produced this guidance primarily for wheeled waste container cleaning companies or franchises. If you want to clean your own commercial or household wheeled waste containers you should follow the same good practice principles. This guidance will help you protect the environment and stay legal.

1. Introduction

Wheeled waste containers (including 'wheelie bins') are commonly used to collect domestic, commercial and trade waste; and materials for recycling. If you're a company offering a wheeled bin cleaning service you should carry out your work professionally and with appropriate precautions. Contaminated wash water, rinse water, solid wastes and cleaning chemicals can cause environmental pollution. You must follow legal requirements for wash water and solid waste disposal if you're doing this work as a business.

2. Legal background

The Environment Agency is responsible for protecting the water environment from pollution under the Water Resources Act 1991 and the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010 in England and Wales. We also have powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to prevent environmental pollution and harm to human health from waste management activities.

Most road gullies and rainwater drains carry surface water (rain water) runoff directly to the nearest river, stream or soakaway. If you allow wheeled waste container washings to enter these drains or discharge onto unmade ground you could be causing water pollution, damaging wildlife and contaminating drinking water sources. Causing pollution or making a discharge without a permit is against the law with a maximum fine of £50,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment for cases taken at a magistrates court.

The wash and rinse water you produce as a business (cleaning company or site owner) is legally defined as a trade effluent. You must always get consent or enter into an agreement with your [local Sewerage Provider](#) before you discharge trade effluent to any public sewer or to a private sewer that connects to a public sewer, (Water Industries Act 1991).

You'll need to dispose (and probably transport and/or store) the solid waste you produced from your cleaning work. There's a wide range of business waste legislation you'll need to comply with. See the government on-line business advice and support service, section 7, for more information.

3. Managing washings from wheeled waste containers

Wheeled waste container washings (wash and rinse water) may contain detergents, disinfectants and waste residues which can all cause pollution. Don't carry out washing in an area that drains to surface water drains. You must discharge the washings to either:

- a foul sewer at a specified location at your own premises, with the agreement and permission of your [local Sewerage Provider](#), or;
- an on-site sewage treatment system that's designed to deal with this waste and where the system's treated effluent discharge is covered by an environmental permit from us.

Customised vehicles are available for wheeled waste container cleaning and we recommend you use these. These carry their own water supply, collect and recycle the wash water. Contaminated wash water can then be discharged to an agreed and permitted foul sewer connection at your premises when the vehicle returns.

4. Residual waste

If you remove residual (left over) solid waste from bins or collect solid wastes screened from bin washings and transport them for onward waste disposal, you will need to register with us as a Waste Carrier to comply with legislation (The Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989). You'll need to produce duty of care transfer notes for each waste movement. See the government on-line business advice and support service for more information about [waste transfer notes](#).

If you store any residual solid waste from your cleaning activities you may need a permit from us.

5. Good practice

- ✓ Before you start cleaning, empty any residual solid waste from the bin into a suitable bag. Add any materials you use to clean the bin, such as wipes. Seal the bag and place it back into the bin after cleaning.
- ✓ Use as little water as possible to clean the container. Use collected rainwater as an alternative source to mains water.
- ✓ Use a customised cleaning vehicle or other equipment that recycles and/or the water for reuse. This reduces the chances of causing pollution and the amount of washings requiring disposal.
- ✓ Use as little detergent or disinfectant as possible to clean the container.
- ✓ Contain and collect all waste wash water and don't let it discharge into any drainage system.
- ✓ Store all detergents and disinfectants safely. They should be kept indoors or in a store/containment area, away from watercourses, open drains, gullies, or areas where water or other liquids can soak into the ground.
- ✓ Keep a suitable spill kit available to deal with any spills as soon as they happen. Produce a spill response plan, test it and make sure you know how to use the equipment.
- ✓ If you're using a customised cleaning vehicle, only carry enough cleaning products for the job, or a day's work. Store and handle them carefully to prevent spills.
- ✓ Register with us as a waste carrier if you remove and transport any residual solid waste from your customers site.
- ✓ All solid waste must be disposed of legally at a permitted (licensed) waste management facility or by an authorised company.
- ✓ Keep wheeled waste containers out of direct sunlight to help reduce odours, fly nuisance and general hygiene problems.
- ✓ Keep bin storage areas clean and tidy and don't leave any litter.

6. Don't...

- ✗ leave any litter or waste at the road side.
- ✗ allow waste wash water, detergent or disinfectant to flow into road gullies, rainwater or surface water drains or onto open/unmade ground.
- ✗ make any unauthorised discharges to foul sewers.
- ✗ use more detergent or disinfectant than you need or let it drip off containers.
- ✗ take water from fire hydrants.

7. Further information

For more information on drainage, trade effluent and good environmental practices visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk/ppg and the government on-line business advice and support service:

- For England – Business Link www.businesslink.gov.uk
- For Wales - Business Wales www.business.wales.gov.uk

For free advice and general information call our customer Contact Centre on 03708 506 506.

In case of an emergency call our incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60** at anytime.