

Secondary Containment for Oils

Understanding what oil is

A common response to the requirement to contain oils is that it's a natural material that seeps from the ground (or ocean), so what's the big deal? The reality is that oil is a mixture of many different chemicals, and while no two oils are the same, they will all have varying levels of toxicity. In short, almost all oils have a toxic effect to exposed organisms.

The impact on the environment

Depending on the concentration, oil will severely impact plant, fish, bird and other wildlife. It can poison animals by internal and external exposure, for example in the case of birds, they will often die because oil fouls their feathers so that they no longer insulate. Oil will quickly impact the ability of fish to breathe or will kill



them from ingestion of other contaminated sea life. Oils of high toxicity can take a long time to disperse or break down, and therefore the environmental impact can have lasting effects on an area for an extended period of time.

Oils in your workplace

If the daily activities on your site involve storage and handling of oil, petrol, diesel, solvents and other

hydrocarbons, then your site has the potential to cause pollution. Any oil that is spilt onto the ground outside or left uncovered, can flow or be washed by rain. This can seep quickly into the ground or storm water drains where it will contaminate the receiving waters; whether it be a stream, river, the sea or groundwater supply.

The trigger at which secondary containment is required

The hazard classification of oils and other hydrocarbons varies considerably from product to product, yet that classification will determine at what point secondary containment is needed. Check the SDS for your product(s) but in many cases, oils are classified as toxic (class 8) and/or ecotoxic (class 9). The table on the next page is a summary at which point you need to have containment in place:

Hazard Classification	Secondary Containment Needed When Amounts Over Those Below
6.1A, 6.1B, 6.1C	100kg or 100L
6.1D, 6.5A, 6.5B, 6.7A	1,000kg or 1,000L
6.6A, 6.7B, 6.8A, 6.9A	10,000kg or 10,000L
9.1A	100kg or 100L
9.1B, 9.1C	1,000kg or 1,000L
9.1D	10,000kg or 10,000L



The amount of secondary containment required

Below is a summary of the level of containment required for the above classes:

Container Size	Total Pooling Potential	Secondary Containment Capacity
Up to 60L	Less than 20,000L	At least 25% of the total
	20,000L or more	5% of the total or 5,000L*
More than 60L and up to 450L	Less than 20,000L	25% of the total, or 110% of the capacity of the largest container*
	20,000L or more	5% of the total or 5,000L*
More than 450L	Less than 20,000L	25% of the total, or 110% of the capacity of the largest container*
	20,000L or more	5% of the total or 5,000L*

*whichever is greater

These summaries are not exhaustive and need to be read alongside other factors within the **Health & Safety at Work (Hazardous Substances) Regulations 2017**.

Whilst the minimum secondary containment thresholds for class 9 hazardous substances might seem high, as best practice we recommend secondary containment for all hazardous substances. Having adequate secondary containment on your site helps reduce the risk of a hazardous substance spill and the potential impact to personnel, the public, the environment and company.

Improving the way oils are stored and handled on site doesn't require a great deal of money or significant changes to the way your site operates currently. Often it will only take a few minor changes, such as labelling containers, limiting access, or moving oils and other hazardous substances onto secondary containment, to reduce the risk of a pollution incident occurring.

Creating safer working environments

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