

HIGH PRESSURE WATER & STEAM CLEANERS: PPG13

POLLUTION PREVENTION GUIDELINES

These notes are for guidance only. They are jointly produced by the Environment Agency for England and Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland, referred to as the Agency or Agencies. Each site will be considered according to the individual circumstances and early consultation with your local Agency Office is advisable. Contact details can be found at the end of these guidelines.

1. GENERAL

The Agencies are responsible for protecting controlled waters from pollution and it is an offence to cause such pollution, either deliberately or accidentally. Controlled waters include all watercourses, canals, lakes, lochs, coastal waters and water contained in underground strata (groundwater). The formal consent of the Agencies is required for many discharges to controlled waters. This includes both direct discharges and discharges to soakaways. Consents are subject to conditions and are not granted automatically.

2. INTRODUCTION

Pressure washers provide a fast and effective mechanism for the removal of dirt, grease and coatings (eg paint) from vehicles, machinery and impermeable surfaces. Wash waters containing the dislodged dirt, grease and grime usually pass directly to the nearest drain.

Pressure washers may be permanently stationed at a cleaning bay or transported to the point of use. The only requirements for their use are an adequate water supply, a power source and a suitable means of waste disposal.

3. THE PROBLEM

Pressure washers may produce large volumes of effluent (50 – 900 litres of water per hour) at high temperatures. Traffic film removers or other cleaning chemicals may be added to increase the effectiveness of the operation and abrasive agents such as sand or grit are sometimes incorporated into the wash waters. The use of pressure washers at marinas and on boats requires great care, especially where antifoulant coatings are present. For further guidance, see PPG14 – Reference 1.

Power washers are often used in open hardstanding areas where the drainage system is only designed to deal with uncontaminated surface water or rainwater. The resulting effluent usually discharges from the site via these drains.

4. HOW WATER POLLUTION OCCURS

Open yards, garage forecourts and car parking areas normally drain to surface water drains, which ultimately discharge to local streams or underground soakaways. If this drainage system becomes polluted through spillage or by contaminated wash waters, pollution of the receiving stream or underground waters will occur.

5. HOW TO AVOID WATER POLLUTION

To avoid the risk of pollution from the use of a power washer, the operator must ensure that any drainage areas that may receive contaminated wash waters do not pass to the surface water system. If in doubt, contact the local council, sewerage undertaker or the Agencies for advice.

If cleaning is normally carried out in one place, it is advisable to:

- designate the area as a washdown bay
- surround the site with a raised kerb
- direct the effluent to the foul sewer.

Discharges to the foul water sewer may require the formal approval of the sewerage undertaker and prior authorisation should be obtained. New connections to the sewerage system may be subject to building regulation approval. Installation of a water recycling system should be considered where large volumes of water are used or no foul sewer is available.

If neither disposal to the foul sewer nor recycling are possible, the effluent must be contained within a sealed drainage system or catchpit for off-site disposal by a licensed waste contractor.

The cleaning of drainage systems using pressure washers may present special difficulties and require the temporary sealing of the system and collection of the effluent. Responsibility for avoiding water pollution rests with both the operator and the site occupier.

6. WATER POLLUTION AND WHAT IT COSTS

Pollution can render surface water and groundwater unsuitable for legitimate use. When the source of pollution is traced, the Agencies will take legal action if appropriate. Courts have the power to impose fines of up to £20,000 on conviction. In addition, any costs incurred in remedying or mitigating the effects of pollution may be recovered by the Agencies from the polluter.

7. REMEMBER

Effluent produced by pressure washing is a trade effluent and special precautions must be taken. The Agencies can advise on your particular application. If in doubt, contact your nearest office (see the list below).

8. REFERENCE

1.PPG14: Pollution prevention guidance for marinas and craft, available from the Agencies

All the Agencies' pollution prevention guidance notes are available on the web sites listed below.

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The 24-hour emergency hotline number for reporting all environmental incidents relating to air, land and water in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

EMERGENCY HOTLINE

0800 80 70 60



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