

# FACT SHEET 8J

## PREVENTING POLLUTION BY CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTORS

Tradespeople and home owners doing work on their properties are responsible for working in a manner that prevents environmental harm. This includes home owners, concreters, bricklayers, concrete truck drivers, concrete pump operators, painters, plumbers, roof restorers and pressure cleaning contractors. Your work can produce physical waste and waste water which can leave the site, entering stormwater systems and watercourses and harm the environment. For example, the waste water from laying, washing or cutting concrete is highly alkaline with a pH of 11-12. Concrete waste water that reaches watercourses, can kill aquatic plants and animals including frogs and fish. Dilution is not an option. It would take one million litres of water to dilute one litre of alkaline waste water back to a safe pH level of 6-7 (Environment Canterbury, 2014).

This fact sheet provides options to assist in preventing pollution.



Agg bags and geofabric to catch sediments

### 1. Plan ahead

Check the weather forecast. Where possible choose a dry day. Assess the site to select preventative controls and clean-up items for the site. Ensure onsite disposal is available and if not, have another plan.

### 2. Onsite

- Set up away from gutters and watercourses.
- Install all appropriate controls prior to commencing work.
- During work, check for any offsite pollution and clean it up if it has occurred.
- Make a bunded area on the lower side of your works to capture all waste water, or build an evaporation trap (shown below), or follow the steps to build one (page 3). You may need to increase its size to cater for your site.
- Find a designated waste stockpile area. If there is not one marked onsite, ask the person responsible for the site to install one away from gutters and watercourses and use it.

Often more than one control measure may be required to prevent pollution. Continually monitor controls during work for their effectiveness and stop works or change controls if needed.



Evaporation Trap

### 3. Cleaning up

Clean tools in designated clean-up areas. If there is not one marked onsite, ask the person responsible for the site to install one away from gutters and watercourses and use it. It is your responsibility not to pollute. During clean-up, check for any offsite pollution. Transfer waste water from the bunded area into a container and dispose of it in a way that does not cause environmental harm elsewhere. Remove the bund/evaporation trap once the water has evaporated and dispose of remaining waste material correctly.

Dispose of waste materials either in the designated waste stockpile area onsite or take it with you and dispose of legally and in a way that does not cause environmental harm elsewhere. For concrete trucks, return the remaining concrete back to the depot in the concrete truck.

For painters, plasterers and tilers, contained wash systems should be used.



### 4. Spills

Always have a Spill Kit onsite.

If a spill does occur:

1. stop the source of the spill immediately;
2. contain the spill and stop it from spreading;
3. clean it up; and
4. place collected material in a location where it will not cause pollution by washing or being washed offsite. Sweep up, do not hose.

### Build an evaporation trap



**Step 1 - create a pond or depression. Its size will be relative to your project.**



**Step 2 - lay non porous material, such as black plastic, over bags to catch water**



**Step 3 - lay permeable material such as geotextile over non-porous layer**



**Step 4 - fill trap with absorbent material mulch, compost, sand, sawdust, soil.**

**Step 5 - Pour waste water into trap. Allow water to evaporate. Dispose of material into rubbish**

## Roof cleaning

Prior to commencing roof cleaning, disconnect downpipes so that waste water will not flow into the stormwater system. Direct flow from the down pipes away from the house or it will flow into the stormwater system, watercourse, or neighbouring properties. Install appropriate controls to contain any sediment onsite.

## Is your tradesperson licenced?

Always check that your tradesperson is licenced for the activity they are undertaking. Check on the NSW Fair Trading website [www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au](http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)

## Environmental legislation and Council Development Consents

Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (POEO), allowing sediment or sediment laden water to enter any waterway including street gutters, stormwater drains, swales or creek lines (flowing or not) is considered to be water pollution. Penalties and notices can apply including fines of up to \$5 million.

Council will enforce the POEO where necessary, however we endeavour to provide information about erosion and sediment control and encourage you to help us protect the Lake by reducing water pollution.

Non-compliance with the conditions of a Development Consent is a breach of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and may also attract fines.

## Further Information

- Council's website;
- the **'Blue Book'** - *Managing Urban Stormwater: Soils and Construction, Landcom* (2004) 4th Ed.;
- International Erosion Control Association (Australasia)(IECA) (free downloads) [www.austieca.com.au](http://www.austieca.com.au);
- Call Council's Erosion and Sediment Control Officer on **02 4921 0333**; or
- *Builders Pocket Guide* [www.bpg.co.nz](http://www.bpg.co.nz) (be aware that some practices outlined in the Guide are not permitted in the Lake Macquarie City Council area).

## Acknowledgements and disclaimer:

This fact sheet contains information from the *Protecting our Environment is Easy* series, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie City councils, *Builders Pocket Guide*. Environment Canterbury (2014).

This brochure is for general information only and is not intended to cover every situation. It is not a regulatory document. Obtain your own independent professional advice.

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