Vehicle Fluid and Repairing Vehicles

Vehicle fluids include any fluid normally used in a vehicle such as engine oil, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, brake fluid, hydraulic fluids and radiator fluid. Many of these fluids can be hazardous in themselves, and may pick up contaminants during use in the vehicle. Some may contaminate water supplies and kill fish and other aquatic life even in small quantities.

Many fluids found in automobiles are hazardous and can contaminate water supplies and kill fish, even in small quantities.

If You Spill...
• Pour kitty litter, sawdust or cornmeal on spills to absorb the spilled materials. Sweep up absorbants after a few hours.
• If it's a large spill (over 1 gallon of absorbant), take the material to a household hazardous waste disposal center or event.
• If it's a small spill, place the used absorbants in a strong plastic bag in the trash.

Motor oil & antifreeze tips

Did you know four quarts of oil — the amount it takes to fill your automobile's engine — can form an 8 acre oil slick on a lake?

It doesn't take much oil to seriously damage the environment. Oil can enter rivers or lakes when someone dumps into a nearby storm drain. Remember. What is dumped into storm drains end up in near-by waterways!
• With more than 25% of all car owners changing their own oil, it is important for them to dispose of it properly. When you change your oil, put used oil into a sturdy container, label it and take it to a local oil recycling location.
• Treat antifreeze the same way. Antifreeze is also dangerous to the environment. It contains ingredients that are poisonous to people, fish and wildlife. Many cats and dogs have died after drinking sweet-tasting puddles of antifreeze found on driveways, ditches or near storm drains.

For information regarding collection centers, contact your local community.

Repair tips

• Keep your vehicle well-tuned and fix leaks from your automobile as soon as possible.
• Recycle all used fluids. Under no circumstances should any vehicle fluid be poured down any drain or dumped in the trash, or dumped onto the ground.
• Place a drip pan under your work area.
• Only repair vehicles in areas where leaks or spills cannot flow into the storm drain. Do not let leaks or spills fall directly on the ground. A good solution is to take your car to a mechanic.
• Do not mix waste oil with gasoline, solvents or other liquids before recycling. These items cannot be recycled if they are "contaminated" by each other.
• Change vehicle fluids indoors whenever possible. If it must be done outdoors, stay clear of any storm drains or sanitary sewers.
• Inspect vehicles regularly for leaking oil and fluids.
• Minimize spills and drips: use spigots, drip pans and funnels when transferring fluids.

Washing Your Automobile

Believe it or not, there are some small changes you can make when washing your car to be environmentally friendly. If you wash it yourself:

• It is best to go to a commercial car wash that uses water efficiently and disposes of runoff properly.
• Wash car on the lawn instead of the driveway to reduce runoff to the street or storm sewer.
• Use non-phosphate biodegradable detergents and mild soaps (see car soap alternatives in section below).
• Use water from a bucket instead of the hose to save water.
• Wash one section of the car at a time and rinse it quickly using a pistol grip nozzle with high pressure and low volume.

Recipes for your automobile

Car soap
1/4 cup vegetable oil-based liquid soap
Warm water
Mix ingredients in pail.

Car wax
1 cup linseed oil
4 tbsp. carnauba wax (available at auto supply stores)
2 tbsp. beeswax
1/2 cup vinegar
Put ingredients in top half of a double-boiler or saucepan. Heat slowly until wax has melted.
Stir and pour into a heat resistant container. After wax has solidified, rub it on the car with a lint-free cloth. Saturate a corner of a cotton rag with vinegar and polish the wax to a deep shine.

Vinyl Cleaner
1/4 cup washing soda (sodium carbonate)
1 cup boiling water

Dissolve washing soda in boiling water. Apply with sponge and wipe off with a damp cloth.

Wash your car on the lawn instead of the driveway to reduce runoff to the street or storm sewer.