

Used Oil

Your guide to used oil collection, management, and disposal.

What is Used Oil?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines used oil as any oil refined from crude oil or any synthetic oil that has been used, and, as a result of such use, contains physical or chemical impurities. Used oil from one oil change can pollute one million gallons of fresh water — a years' supply for 50 people! Used oil must be managed properly to prevent polluting water and the environment.

Used oil often includes hydraulic oil, transmission oil, gear oil, and power steering fluid. However, the presence of other impurities such as toxic metals like lead, cadmium, and chromium could cause the used oil to meet the definition of hazardous waste. Mixtures of used oil and hazardous waste, like solvents or pesticides, must be managed as hazardous waste.

Used oil regulations encourage or require collecting and recycling used oil with reduced hazardous waste disposal requirements. Check with used oil contractors for acceptable materials.

**USED METAL OIL FILTERS
CAN BE RECYCLED.**

**USED PAPER OIL FILTERS
CAN BE DISPOSED OF IN
THE TRASH, IF PROPERLY
DRAINED; OTHERWISE, THEY
NEED TO BE MANAGED AS
HAZARDOUS WASTE.**

Used Oil Collection, Storage, and Management

A variety of establishments collect used oil. County transfer stations, automotive stores, and repair facilities allow individuals to drop off small containers of used oil. Tribes may establish used oil collection areas to make responsible recycling and disposal more convenient for residents.

If your transfer station accumulates and stores used oil, implement the following recommendations:

Oil Handling Recommendations

- ✓ When handling used oil, use personal protective equipment (PPE) – at a minimum, eye protection (safety glasses or goggles) and oil-resistant gloves. An apron is recommended for protection from leaks. Used oil is insoluble, persistent, and may contain toxic chemicals and heavy metals.
- ✓ Do not allow any other substance, such as solvents, paint, pesticides, water, or antifreeze, to be collected in the same storage container as used oil. Visually screen for any prohibited substances.
- ✓ Determine a protocol for adding used oil to the bulk storage container. Solvents, non-oil products, and contaminants are more likely to be added to the bulk oil container if customers have unmonitored access.
 - As a best practice, receive personal containers directly from customers or direct customers to leave personal containers on a storage pallet with secondary containment to then be visually inspected and poured into the bulk storage container by transfer station staff.
- ✓ Drain used oil containers into the tank or drum until there is no continuous flow. Dispose of empty containers as non-hazardous solid wastes. (Note, industry-funded collection programs for used oil containers are currently under development.)

Labeling Recommendations

- ✓ Clearly label all storage containers and tanks with "Used Oil" and the date of accumulation for the first oil added to the container or tank.
- ✓ After emptying the storage container or tank, record how much used oil was removed and reset the labeled start date of accumulation.

Storage Recommendations

- ✓ Utilize secondary containment in the used oil collection area.



From left: Used oil containers on top of a secondary containment pallet; a used oil collection tank surrounded by spill containment.

- ✓ Only store used oil in tanks and storage containers. Used oil tanks and containers are not subject to RCRA hazardous waste regulations if they are labeled and in good condition.



Aboveground tanks for used oil collection.

- ✓ Keep storage containers and tanks in good condition. Replace rusted, leaking, or deteriorated tanks. Fix structural defects like broken welds, dents, holes, and severe rusting immediately.
- ✓ For fewer than 100 gallons of used oil, use multiple 55-gallon drums rather than a tank. If any of the used oil is determined unacceptable, disposing of non-specification drums is much less expensive than emptying and cleaning a tank that had non-used oil products added.
- ✓ Locate tanks and storage containers in an area protected from vehicles.
- ✓ Ensure the collection area is covered to protect from weather.

Visual Screening

Used oil can become contaminated with solvents, water, antifreeze, or other products. Prior to accepting used oil or prior to adding the used oil to the main storage container, used oil should be visually screened for contaminants.

If the used oil appears...	Then it is likely mixed with...
too thin	a solvent
milky white or yellow	water or antifreeze
distinct layers	a non-petroleum product

As part of your visual screen, the collected used oil can be into a clear plastic jar before it is added to main collection container. After a few moments:

- ✓ If there is no reaction, add the oil to the main collection container.
- ✗ If there is any reaction, such as bubbling, layering, or color shifting to white or gray, do not add the oil to the main container. Dispose of the contaminated oil and the jar contents properly.

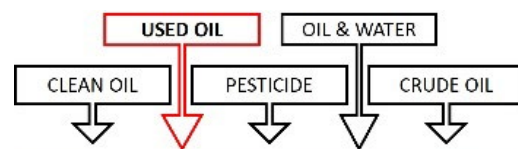
During your visual screen, keep in mind the following tips and best practices:

- To avoid exposure, discourage smelling the used oil or inhaling fumes.
- Consider purchasing a flammable gas detector or using chlorinated solvent detectors.
- **WHEN IN DOUBT, LEAVE THE USED OIL OUT!**
- If the used oil main collection container or the individual oil containers are contaminated:
 - Stop adding additional used oil and seal the container.
 - Test the contents of the collection container to assess added substances.
 - Look into your disposal and removal options.

Note that if individual oil containers include PCBs, pesticides, solvents, or other substances that meet the criteria for hazardous waste, the mixture may need to be managed as hazardous waste. Sometimes, oil haulers will take contaminated oil for an additional fee.

Used Oil Spills

Used oil spills usually happen from leaking containers or during transfer into a container or tank. When a spill happens, use eye protection, gloves, and other PPE. Place spill pads and absorbent around the spill area and work the absorbent into the oil with a shovel. After cleanup, manage used absorbent as a hazardous waste.



Contaminated used oil vials



Spill kit contents and example container

Disposing of Used Oil from Your Transfer Station

Contact your nearest county transfer station or automotive facility to determine oil collection availability and quantity limits. Some used oil centers have equipment to suction used oil from drums into the used oil tank and return the drum to the customer. Empty oil drums may require disposal to a metal recycler or as hazardous waste. Reach out to local licensed used oil haulers for details and cost information.

State Requirements

If used oil is transported off Tribal lands, relevant state regulations must be followed. Some state regulations for managing used oil are stricter than EPA's federal regulations. Contact your state's environmental authority to determine the options for transporting and disposing of used oil.

California-Specific Note: A California certified used oil collection center is a facility that accepts no more than 55 gallons of used oil from any person who transports used oil to the facility for consolidation and subsequent recycling. Under certain conditions, a location where used oil is accepted may be eligible for an exemption from the hazardous waste facility permit requirement. Check with your local used oil collection center for their policies.



To find a certified used oil collection center in California, search [CalRecycle's Used Oil Certified Collection Centers Locator](#).

Used oil collection centers are subject to the requirements applicable to generators of hazardous waste found in California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Chapter 12, commencing with Section 66262.10.

To comply with these requirements, contract with a licensed hauler to transport used oil to a recycler. In California, used oil haulers must be registered with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). Find a list of licensed haulers/hazardous waste transporters through [DTSC's website](#).

Additional Resources:

EPA's [Managing Used Oil: Answers to Frequent Questions for Businesses](#) webpage has information on requirements for storage, requirements for addressing spills, recordkeeping, and many other specific topics.

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