

## **PREVENTING POLLUTION FROM WHEELIE BIN CLEANING**

The Environment Agency has drawn up the following guidelines to assist cleaning operators and the general public in the safe, environmentally friendly, hygienic method of carrying out the cleaning of wheelie bins.

NOTE: This guidance is for the cleaning of domestic bins only and NOT TRADE WASTE.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Wheelie bins are a relatively new method of assisting in the recycling of waste. Most households will have two bins, one for recycling and one for general domestic material, which may include kitchen waste that has not been used for composting in your garden. Unfortunately, these general waste bins can give rise to offensive odours, fly nuisance and general hygiene problems. In an attempt to reduce this, many small companies are being set up offering a 'Wheelie bin' cleaning service. If this is not undertaken professionally with the appropriate precautions, the contaminated wash water produced by the cleaning technique can cause pollution to the environment.

### **2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Agency is responsible for both the protection of "controlled waters" from pollution under the Water Resources Act 1991 in England and Wales and the prevention of pollution of the environment, harm to human health and detriment to local amenity by waste management activities under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

It is an offence to cause pollution of controlled waters either deliberately or accidentally. "Controlled waters" include all watercourses and water contained in underground strata (or "groundwater"). In addition, the formal consent of the Agency is required for many discharges to controlled waters. Consents are granted subject to conditions and are not issued automatically.

All discharges to the foul sewer require authorisation by the appropriate sewerage undertaker and may be subject to the terms and conditions of a trade effluent consent.

### **3. GOOD PRACTICE**

By following the guidance in this section, operators should avoid causing water pollution.

- a. Prior to cleaning, empty any residual waste from the bin into a suitable bag which should then be sealed.
- b. Use the minimum quantity of water in cleaning.
- c. By filtering the water used in the process for re-use, 250 litres can clean up to 250 bins.
- d. Minimise the amount of detergent or disinfectant used. Bio-degradable products are best.
- e. Ensure that no waste water passes into any drainage system.
- f. All contaminated material, such as wipes, should be bagged and placed into the bin.
- g. Return all bagged material back into the bin.
- h. Leave the cleaning location clean and tidy and leave no litter.
- i. Use a purpose made/customised cleaning vehicle.
- j. Dispose of all contaminated water at a licensed waste water disposal site (your local water company will advise of nearest location, a licence is required and a charge may be made).
- k. Store detergent and disinfectant safely, prevent spillage, only carry enough for a day's work.
- l. Store your wheelie bin out of direct sunlight, it may help reduce the cleaning requirement.

### **4. ACTIONS TO AVOID**

Do not:

- a. dump waste at the road side or leave any litter.
- b. allow waste water to flow into road drains.
- c. allow detergent or disinfectant to contaminate the working area.
- d. take water from fire hydrants.
- e. pressure wash the ground area using chemicals.
- f. dispose of contaminated water into nearest road gully.

## **5. VEHICLE BASED CLEANERS**

Customised vehicles are available for wheelie bin cleaning. These carry a supply of water and collect the wash water for re-cycling and final disposal to foul sewer at an approved site. The use of such vehicles should prevent the problem of water disposal on site.

## **6. DRAINAGE SYSTEMS**

Whatever method you use for wheelie bin cleaning, you must not cause pollution of a watercourse. Most road gullies and drains are designed to carry surface water directly to the nearest river or stream, so any contaminated water discharged into them will cause pollution, which is an offence, with a maximum fine of £20,000 in a magistrates court.

## **7. CONTACTING THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY**

It is always best to get it right in the first place, so please contact the Agency for free advice and help us to prevent pollution on 0845 9333111.

For any further information, please contact your Agency Regional Office at:

Anglian Region Peterborough 01733 371811	Southern Region Worthing 01903 832000
North West Region Warrington 01925 653999	South West Region Exeter 01392 444000
North East Region Leeds 0113 244 0191	Thames Region Reading 0118 9535000
Midlands Region Solihull 0121 711 2324	Welsh Region Cardiff 01222 770088

...or at all times in an emergency on Freephone 0800 80 70 60