



Australian Government

Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts

# WHY WE SHOULD RECYCLE USED MOTOR OIL

Disposing of used motor oil the wrong way has the potential to pollute the environment.  
We need to recover and recycle as much of it as possible.



Contact your local  
council for the  
nearest used oil  
collection facility.



It is important to remember to recycle used motor oil or 'sump oil' as it is sometimes called after an oil change. Around 500 million litres of lubricating oil are sold in Australia each year. Cars, trucks, farm machines, boats and some industrial machines all need regular oil changes and produce large volumes of used oil that can be reclaimed and reused.

Australians are good at recycling, with about 250 million litres of used motor oil recycled, during the 2007–08 financial year.

## Used motor oil is hazardous

Motor oil picks up a variety of hazardous contaminants when used in engines and transmissions. These contaminants include lead, cadmium, chromium, arsenic, dioxins, benzene and polycyclic aromatics. If used motor oil and the contaminants it contains are disposed of inappropriately and released into the environment, they can harm humans, plants, animals, fish and shellfish.

In water, oil is a visible pollutant, floating as a scum on the surface. This oil scum can stop sunlight and oxygen from getting into the water, affecting fish and water plants. It can kill fish, frogs and other animals that breathe from the water's surface.

Low temperature burning of used oil can create airborne pollutants which can get into people's lungs and have adverse health effects.

[environment.gov.au](http://environment.gov.au)

One litre of oil can contaminate one million litres of water.



Remember: you can also recycle used oil filters, oily rags and oil containers.



## Used motor oil can be recycled

Oil doesn't wear out, it just gets dirty. Used oil can be cleaned, re-refined and used again and again.

Used motor oil can undergo various treatments and then be used as an industrial burner fuel, or re-refined back into new lubricating and hydraulic oil. More information about the processing of used oil is available at: [www.oilrecycling.gov.au/what-happens.html](http://www.oilrecycling.gov.au/what-happens.html)

## How can I recycle my used oil?

If you only produce a small amount of used oil from vehicles or farm machinery, you can take it to a used oil collection facility run by your local council. The facility will usually be located at a landfill, waste transfer station or works depot.

## Appropriate disposal

Used motor oil is a valuable resource. If it is disposed of at a used oil collection facility it can be recovered and re-used without posing a threat to humans or the environment.

No other substances should ever be allowed to mix with used oil. Contamination by water or other chemicals may mean the used oil can't be recycled.

## Inappropriate disposal

Unfortunately, not all used motor oil is disposed of appropriately in Australia. Used motor oil ends up in landfill when put into containers in household garbage bins. Inappropriate uses include pouring onto weeds, spraying on roads as a dust suppressant, cleaning tools and protecting timber posts and fences from termites. These practices are harmful because the used oil can then enter the soil and leach through to contaminate ground water.

Storing containers of used oil in sheds on farms and in garages creates a fire hazard. It is also dangerous to store used oil in containers for long periods of time. Many materials can degrade when in contact with used oil, increasing the risk of a spill.

## How does the Australian Government support oil recycling?

Through the Product Stewardship for Oil Program, the Australian Government provides industry incentives to increase the recycling of used motor oil. More information on the program is available at: [www.oilrecycling.gov.au](http://www.oilrecycling.gov.au)

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