

**Guidelines**  
For the  
**MITIGATION OF ACCIDENTAL DISCHARGES OF  
MOTOR VEHICLE FLUIDS (NON-CARGO)**

**APPROVED**  
**6/25/04**



**REVISED**  
**10/30/13**

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**Purpose, Goal and Objectives**

The following guidelines were prepared to outline steps that can be taken by early responders to motor vehicle crashes to reduce the confusion and subsequent delays in re-opening roadways when spilled vehicle fluids are involved. Refer to the existing policies in place for dealing with Hazardous Material releases.

These guidelines were developed by the multi agency, Florida Statewide Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Program to clarify the goals, objectives and processes for clearing the highway of spilled motor vehicle fluids resulting from crashes and other vehicle incidents. The guidelines were reviewed and endorsed by the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and Florida Highway Patrol. The content of these guidelines is based on and consistent with the open letter to Fire-Rescue Departments and other response agencies from the Department of Environmental Protection dated July 13, 2009.

Spilled vehicle fluids are generally petroleum products, and most commonly are crank-case engine oil or diesel fuel, but they may also include transmission, hydraulic, or other fluids. Typically, absorbed vehicle fluids rarely fail the Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure (TCLP) and thus are **usually not hazardous wastes**.

The goal is to provide guidance to responders and assist them in meeting the primary TIM goal of the Open Road Policy (ORP), namely to clear the traffic incident scene within 90-minutes of the arrival of the first responder. In many incidents involving this level of spill, this goal can be far exceeded if these guidelines are followed.

The objectives of these guidelines are to:

- Provide specific procedural guidance for spilled vehicle fluid cleanup, and;
- Provide a reference for the disposal of spill materials.

**Definitions**

For the purposes of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

- Absorbent materials are any materials, manufactured or natural that may be used to absorb spilled fluid, and may include commercial absorbents, sawdust, floor sweep, peat moss, absorbent pads, sand, clay or even topsoil.
- Cargo means the commercial (or other) materials being transported by the motor vehicle. Materials that are an intrinsic part of the vehicle itself are “non-cargo”, even if the vehicle is a commercial vehicle.

- Commercial vehicle is one that carries cargo of commercial materials for pay, and may include, but not limited to, small, medium and heavy trucks; panel trucks and vans; tractor-trailers; commercial busses.
- **Defensive Actions For the purpose of these Guidelines Defensive Actions are those actions taken to contain the vehicle fluids.**
- Hazardous materials (HAZMAT) are materials posing immediate life-threatening danger to people and property, as defined in the US DOT “Emergency Response Guidebook”
- **Offensive Actions For the purpose of these Guidelines Offensive Actions are those actions taken by trained responders to plug or otherwise stop vehicle fluid leaks.**
- Private vehicle is any vehicle that is used for the personal transportation of its occupants on a not-for-hire basis, and may include, but not be limited to, passenger cars and cycles, vans and SUVs, motor homes and recreational vehicles, and busses used for private purposes.
- Responders may include law enforcement, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), fire rescue, wrecker operators, Road Rangers, contractors, and DOT or local highway agencies.
- Responsible Party (RP) is the entity having dominion over the product prior to the spill, not necessarily the party responsible for the accident.
- Spill means the expulsion of any vehicle fluids upon the roadway itself or the abutting areas that cause an immediate threat to traffic by hindering its normal operation in any way (covering surfaces causing slicks, dripping onto traffic below, etc.).
- Vehicle fluid, or simply fluid(s), are non-cargo liquid materials that are spilled from the vehicle, such as gasoline, diesel fuel; motor oil; coolants; transmission, brake and hydraulic fluids. These may originate from the engine, drive train, fuel tanks, wheel assemblies, compressors, air handlers or any component of the vehicle, including tractor and trailer, as applicable.

## Scope

These guidelines only apply to spilled motor vehicle fluids from private and commercial vehicles used for the operation of the vehicle. They do not apply to any hazardous material cargo spill.

The full extent of these guidelines cover crashes involving commercial vehicles. Spilled fluids from **passenger vehicle** crashes that are less than 25 gallons are exempt from reporting requirements, but still must be cleaned up to the satisfaction of DEP by responders or vehicle owners in accordance with this guideline for clearance.

## Clearance Procedure

In situations involving the spillage of vehicle fluids on a roadway from both **commercial vehicles** and **private vehicles**, the preferred clean-up method is to soak up as much material as possible using absorbent materials. Also, move the absorbent materials out of the travel lanes and store **outside of the clear zone, following appropriate maintenance of traffic guidelines**. In some cases the material may be containerized or placed in the damaged vehicle(s) for removal by the towing company. **Note DOT and other crash-scene responders may apply absorbents and sweep off travel lanes regardless of the quantity** It is **not** necessary to await a clean-up contractor.

Clean up normally involves the use of granular absorbents or vermiculite, floor sweep, peat moss, pads and booms, clay or topsoil. In limited situations, sand can also be used but it is better suited for increasing friction than to be used as an absorbent. If immediately available, an alternative method for dealing with the thin film that may remain after absorbents are used is to apply a light dusting with Portland cement.

Defensive **actions** can include containment, diking or soil berming. Offensive **actions** can include stopping the leak at the source. These efforts not only limit the size of the release, but also can help prevent the spilled material from entering storm drains. Pails, buckets, kiddie pools, as well as hand transfer pumps are typical items used to contain and limit diesel fuel spills on roadways. Before any actions are taken the materials should be properly identified using the Emergency Response Guidebook or other reference guide. Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be used. Actions to be taken also depend on the responders' level of training and expertise.

The Responsible Party (RP) is accountable for vehicle fluid spillage, including the final removal and proper disposal of absorbents and if needed the subsequent site remediation. If the RP does not or cannot handle this responsibility in a timely manner, the governing authority [State of Florida, County, City, etc.] will initiate disposal and the responsible party will be billed. **Clean-up actions taken by early responders do not affect or limit this responsibility.**

Responders should be aware that it often takes several hours for a clean-up contractor to arrive on-scene. Therefore, priority should be given to re-opening the travel lanes. In many cases lanes can be re-opened with a minimal effort using available absorbents applied by on-scene personnel.

Additional or incidental material spilled during the relocation of the vehicle out of the travel lanes of the roadway can be cleaned up and moved to the roadside with the other absorbents used at the scene. *The responsible party remains accountable!*

Absorbent material moved out of travel lanes may be bagged in heavy-duty trash bags, wrapped or 'diapered' in plastic sheeting, or containerized in pails or barrels. The material should be well off the travel portion of the roadway and can remain there a reasonable time to allow for disposal by the responsible party or a contractor, (paid by the responsible party). The material may be placed in a container and placed in the damaged vehicle(s) and removed by the towing company for proper disposal.

The containers used to hold the material should be tagged and clearly marked to indicate the type of absorbent used and the material that was spilled. It is also desirable to indicate the responsible party. Care should be taken not to overload the containers used to store the absorbents. If trash bags are used, double bag and limit each bag to about 15 pounds.

The reportable quantity of 25 gallons does not automatically prevent or limit on scene actions to mitigate the spill. In fact **prompt intervention is encouraged** to limit the congestion impact and prevent the high probability of secondary incidents as a result of

extended traffic blockage. **It is very important that every effort be made to limit the amount of time the spilled fluids are in contact with asphalt pavement.**

Traffic cones or other readily identifiable methods should be used at the site to mark the location of the material for later retrieval.

Spill cleanup by a fire department; highway agency, wrecker operator, roadway contractor or the responsible party should be limited to spills of a magnitude within their capabilities. **However, no *qualified responder is restricted from taking prompt action to stop the spill at its source or to contain and limit the size of the spill, to limit the damage to the pavement surface, and to prevent any flammable material from catching fire.***

Vehicle fluid spills, which have soaked into soil, will require cleanup but may be completed at a later date by the responsible party. Care must be taken to locate any underground utilities prior to the excavation of contaminated soil.

Disposal options for non-hazardous fuels, oils, and other vehicle fluids include, but not limited to:

- Thermal treatment at a permitted soil burner
- The use of an approved oil hauler for liquids
- Incineration at a local landfill incinerator
- And delivery to a local Household Hazardous Waste Facility. (Some limitations may apply)

Responders should have 'Right to know' instruction for handling these vehicle fluids and have completed the "Awareness" level of Hazardous Material Training at a minimum.

#### **NOTIFICATION and REPORTABLE QUANTITIES**

Florida DEP has adopted the US Environmental Protection Agency's **Reportable Quantities (RQ)** for hazardous substances, and an **RQ of 25 gallons for spilled petroleum products** spilled on land, or any amount which causes a sheen on surface waters shall be reported. If in doubt about the amount, it is recommended the incident be reported by calling the State Watch Office, who will contact DEP's Bureau of Emergency Response (BER).

#### **STATE WATCH OFFICE [800] 320-0519, 24 hours, 7 days**

When calling be prepared to give the location, type of fluid spilled, RP name, address and phone number.

## VEHICLE FLUID SPILL CLEAN-UP GUIDELINES

# Quick Action Guide

- Identify spill as a vehicle fluid
- Stop leaking material at the source
- Contain and limit spill from spreading
- Apply available absorbent
- Sweep material off travel lanes
- Apply second application, if necessary
- Gradually restore traffic flow
- Identify Reportable Quantity and mark location of material
- Ensure proper notification is made; State Watch Office 800/320-0519 or appropriate FDOT personnel

All of these actions should be based on responder's level of training, use of the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and following relevant Maintenance of Traffic Guidelines.