Even biodegradable detergents pollute the environment and are not permitted to enter the stormwater system

The Law

The Polluter Pays

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is a law designed to protect our environment. It is illegal for any substance to be discharged into natural water, the stormwater system, land or air unless authorised by a resource consent or a district or regional plan. Polluters can be fined up to $1,000, issued abatement notices, or prosecuted and fined up to $600,000 for breaching the RMA.

Landowners: you are responsible for any work on your land. Make sure the contractor you hire knows how to do the job properly.

Employers: you are responsible for the actions of your staff. Make sure you train them well and give them the proper tools to do the job correctly.

Workers: you are responsible for doing the job in a manner that does not breach the environmental protections put in place by your employer. If you cause pollution, you and/or your company could be held liable for clean-up costs and/or penalties.

Report all spills immediately to the Pollution Response Hotline on 09 377 3107

Pressure Washing or Water Blasting

Preventing Pollution in Our Waterways

What's the Problem?

Common Pressure Washing or Water-blasting Activities and Contaminants

It is illegal and harmful to discharge waterblasting waste into the stormwater system as it can negatively affect the quality of our environment. It is your responsibility to prevent discharges from your water-blasting activities into street drains. Make sure you put appropriate controls in place before you start.

Run-off from waterblasting a terracotta roof which went into a stream, causing pollution
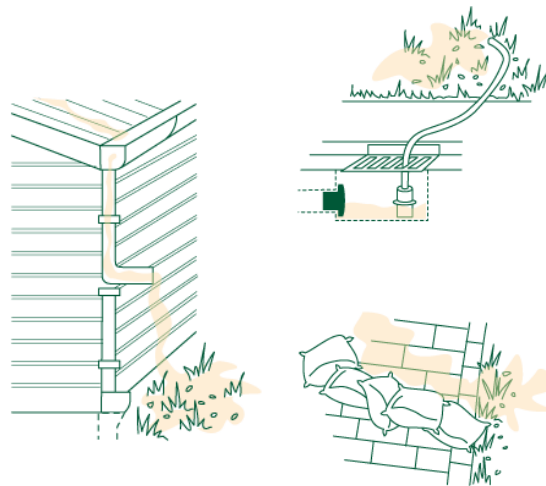
Pressure washing or waterblasting waste is much more concentrated than roof run-off caused by rain. If you are pressure-cleaning a surface, it is because rain alone could not clean it. Therefore, you need to prevent all contaminants such as grime, algae, moss, mould, lichen, sediment, grease, paint chips and dirt from entering the stormwater system, as it may harm aquatic life. Using waterblasting techniques to expose aggregate also discharges wastewater with elevated pH due to the lime content of cement, and can be extremely harmful to the receiving environment.

What Can You Do?

Good practice

If you are required to waterblast a roof, you must ensure that no contaminants enter the stormwater system through downpipes or drains. This can be accomplished by disconnecting downpipes and **diverting water to unsealed ground**, or **blocking drains** by using rubber bungs or other devices, and **removing the wash-water** upon completion of works.

Block catchpit outfalls and use a pump or bucket to remove wash-water to unsealed ground or a container / drum. Alternatively, use a vacuum truck to remove the waste water.

Quick Tip

When quoting a job, factor in containment and sediment control options. This may include downpipe diversion devices, wet-vac hire, sand socks, drain mats or other equipment required to ensure environmental compliance. Contractors can be held liable for uncontrolled discharges of wash-water to the stormwater system.

Quick Tips

When using moss and mould remover and biodegradable detergents,

- treat them like any other potentially harmful chemicals
- do not wash them off surfaces without controls in place
- ensure they do not enter the stormwater system
- do not apply them when rain is forecast.

Stormwater controls can be as simple as diverting wash-water away from stormwater drains to unsealed ground with reusable sandbags or sand socks.

Environment Management Plans

If you are a company that routinely undertakes water blasting or pressure-washing activities it is beneficial to create an Environmental Management Plan (EMP). An EMP is a written document that explains the risk of your activities to the environment and describes how you will manage these risks (i.e. control options and catch pit protection). Use your expertise and innovation to develop methods of containment, and ensure all staff are aware of the standards of work expected and of the contents of the EMP document.