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# PLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE: VEHICLE WASHES WATER MANAGEMENT UNIT

A Guidance Note for Planning Officers and Applicants  
for Planning Permission

January 2011



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## **1. Scope**

- 1.1 This document is intended to be a quick reference guide for Planning Officers dealing with, and for potential planning applicants intending to make, a planning application for a vehicle wash.
- 1.2 More detailed information on how Water Management Unit interacts with the Planning System can be found in the document titled 'Water Management Unit General Planning Guidance Note – A Guidance Note for Planning Officers and Applicants for Planning Permission, which can be found on the NIEA website at [http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/water-home/development\\_management.htm](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/water-home/development_management.htm)

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 The Water Management Unit (WMU) is the unit within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) with responsibility for the protection of the aquatic environment.

## **3. WMU's Role in the Planning System**

- 3.1 WMU's role in the planning system is to act as a consultee to Planning Service, an Agency within the Department of the Environment.
- 3.2 Once an applicant makes a planning application Planning Service will forward consultees a copy of the application form, all relevant plans and any other supporting documents that are submitted with the planning application. WMU's role is thus to advise Planning Service of the likely or potential impacts of the proposed development on the aquatic environment during its construction, operation and eventual decommission, if applicable.

## **4. Responding to Planning Consultations for Vehicle Washes**

- 4.1 WMU will assess all the information submitted to it as part of the application from Planning Service. WMU will then identify any potential impacts on the aquatic environment and advise Planning Service accordingly.
- 4.2 WMU may request further information from the applicant through Planning Service. This may delay a planning decision. It is therefore important that the applicant has included all relevant information (see section 7), in the application, in relation to the proposed development's potential impact on the aquatic environment.
- 4.3 It is important to note that WMU only advises Planning Service, it can not make a decision on whether or not a planning application receives planning permission. Planning Service is responsible for deciding whether or not planning permission will be granted.
- 4.4 WMU is committed to working with applicants, through Planning Service, where a risk to the aquatic environment has been identified.

## **5. Statutory Water Quality Requirements for Vehicle Washes**

- 5.1 Effluent and run-off from vehicle washes can impact upon the aquatic environment. Dirt, brake dust and oil that is washed off are all pollutants. Cleaning agents (including those labelled biodegradable) are poisonous to river life. WMU therefore has a

responsibility to ensure that vehicle washes, which have a potential impact on the aquatic environment, comply with a number of statutory permissions.

- 5.2 Although it is not a statutory requirement to have the relevant permissions in place prior to applying for planning permission, it is desirable and will help WMU make an informed and timely response to Planning Service. If all the relevant permissions have been granted it is extremely unlikely that WMU would object to planning permission.
- 5.3 Developers should therefore consider if their proposed vehicle wash requires any of the following statutory permissions:

- **Do I Need a Discharge Consent?**

PPG13 (see section 6) highlights the recycling and reuse of water as the best environmental option for dealing with vehicle washing and cleaning effluent.

The discharge of all vehicle washing and cleaning effluent to a public foul sewer for treatment at a Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) is highlighted by PPG13 as the next best environmental option. However, this option is conditional on the sewer and the WWTW having the capacity to receive the extra discharge. A discharge consent issued under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 is not required for discharge to a public foul sewer but permission is required from Northern Ireland Water Ltd.

A further option during the operation of the site would be to collect all the effluent in a holding tank for off-site removal and disposal via a registered/licensed carrier to a consented treatment facility.

If developers cannot recycle and reuse their water, connect to a public sewer or collect their effluent for off site disposal they can apply for a consent issued under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 to discharge this effluent. However, the highly polluting nature of this type of effluent along with the intermittent flows associated with this activity makes on site treatment very difficult. Consent to discharge is not likely to be granted if detergents are used in the process. You should therefore contact WMU's Industrial Consent Team on 028 9262 3034 before investing in or installing an effluent treatment system.

If the planning proposal will include toilets or sanitary wash facilities a discharge consent will be required for any septic tank or private treatment plant proposed.

You may also require a discharge consent for site drainage during the construction phase of the proposal. This will be a stand alone consent, and will therefore require a separate application.

- **Do I Need a FEPA Licence?**

If your proposed vehicle wash will involve any construction works that will occur within 50 metres of the Mean High Water Spring Tide mark you may require a licence issued under Part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 (A FEPA Licence). This also applies to proposed pipeline outfalls terminating in the sea. You should therefore notify WMU's Marine Assessment and Licensing Team if you plan any work close to the coast so that they can determine if you will require a FEPA Licence.

- **Do I Need an Abstraction/Impoundment Licence?**

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<sup>1</sup>Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, SI 1999 No. 662 (N.I.) 6

<sup>2</sup>Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, (c.48)

<sup>3</sup>Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, SR 2006, No. 482

If your proposed vehicle wash includes the excavation of a storage structure, depending on the geological setting, the potential exists for the water table to be encountered during these works. If water is encountered, an appropriate abstraction/impoundment licence issued under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 may be required.

An abstraction/impoundment licence may also be required if any abstraction of surface waters or groundwater is proposed as part of the proposal.

In such circumstances you should contact the Abstraction and Impoundment Licensing Team of WMU to determine if you require an appropriate licence.

- 5.4 Developers and operators should be aware that there is no guarantee that the required statutory permissions will be granted, as a number of site specific factors need to be taken into account in assessing the suitability of such activities on the aquatic environment. Developers and operators should therefore engage with WMU at the earliest opportunity.

## **6. Pollution Prevention Advice**

- 6.1 WMU will recommend that the developer strictly follows the guidance provided by the relevant Pollution Prevention Guidelines (PPGs) during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases of a development. [PPGs can be downloaded at http://www.netregs.gov.uk/netregs/links/107968.aspx](http://www.netregs.gov.uk/netregs/links/107968.aspx). PPGs are targeted at a particular industrial sector or activity, they outline statutory responsibilities and provide guidance on good practice to reduce pollution risk.

- 6.2 The most relevant PPGs for the construction and operation of a vehicle wash are:

PPG 1 – General guide to the prevention of pollution;  
PPG 2 – Above ground oil storage tanks;  
PPG 3 – Use and design of oil separators in surface water drainage systems;  
PPG 5 – Works and maintenance in or near water;  
PPG 6 – Working at construction and demolition sites;  
PPG 13 - Vehicle washing and cleaning  
PPG 21 – Pollution incident response planning;  
PPG 27 – Installation, decommissioning and removal of underground storage tanks;

This list is not exhaustive; advice offered by other PPG's may be relevant for certain projects.

- 6.3 WMU may also offer site specific advice on a case by case basis.

## **7. What Should I Include In My Planning Application?**

- 7.1 WMU has no statutory authority to require particular information to be included in a planning application. It is Planning Service's duty to inform applicants as to what information they are required to include.

- 7.2 However, it is in the interest of the applicant to provide enough information in their planning application to enable WMU to make an informed and timely response to Planning Service.

7.3 WMU would recommend that the following information be included, where appropriate, in a planning application:

- A copy of any statutory permissions granted by WMU for the proposed site;
- A detailed site drainage plan indicating how contaminated water from washing bays will be separated from uncontaminated site drainage from other parts of the site and from any foul (sewage) drainage. It should be noted that oil interceptors are ineffective if detergents are allowed to enter them. PPG 13 and PPG 3 should be consulted for guidance.
- WMU would recommend the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to deal with uncontaminated site drainage. Construction of SuDS should comply with the design and construction standards as set out in the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) manual C697. A separate site handbook (C698) for the construction of SuDS has also been produced by CIRIA.
- Maps of the site indicating the location of any waterways;
- A Method of Works Statement which identifies the work processes that may potentially impact on the aquatic environment, and proposed mitigation measures, during the construction phase of the proposed vehicle wash. The Statement should also identify relevant PPG's and how they will be applied.
- Where the proposed development of a vehicle wash has the potential to alter surface or groundwater flow/quality, a hydrological or hydrogeological risk assessment may be required.

7.4 Not all of the information detailed will be appropriate for every planning application. However, every effort should be made by the applicant to include all relevant information, as failure to do so may result in WMU requesting missing information. This may delay the issue of a planning decision.

7.5 You should contact WMU if you require any further information on WMU's requirements.

## **8. How Do I Contact Water Management Unit?**

8.1 In the first instance you can find a raft of useful information on our website at <http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/>, including application forms and guidance notes for applying for the relevant permissions.

8.2 Alternatively you can request information through our Information Management Team via email: [waterinfo@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:waterinfo@doeni.gov.uk)

8.3 You may wish to write to us at:

Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Water Management Unit  
17 Antrim Road  
Lisburn  
BT28 3AL

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Northern Ireland Environment Agency  
Klondyke Building  
Cromac Avenue  
Gasworks Business Park  
Belfast BT7 2JA  
T. 0845 302 0008

[www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)

Our aim is to protect, conserve and promote the natural environment and built heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.



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**Environment**  
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