

OIL/WATER SEPARATOR (OWS) MAINTENANCE

Introduction

Oil/water separators (OWS), also known as gas/oil separators, are structural devices intended to provide pretreatment of floor drain water from industrial and garage facilities. An OWS allows oils (and substances lighter than water) to be intercepted and be removed for disposal before entering the sanitary sewer system. Substances heavier than water settle into sludge at the bottom of the unit. The remaining water passes through the unit into the sanitary sewer system.

OWS units are generally required where petroleum-based products, wastes containing petroleum, or oily and/or flammable materials are used, produced, or stored. OWS units should not be used to manage stormwater or flow from vehicle washing facilities. High flow rates through an OWS will reduce the structure's ability to separate materials. Detergents and solvents can emulsify oil and grease, allowing the particles to enter the sewer, so these should not be disposed of in drains entering the OWS.

General OWS Maintenance Procedures

1. Each OWS at a facility may receive different materials in different quantities, so the cleanout schedule may not be the same for every OWS at a facility.
2. Employees performing inspections of an OWS must be properly trained and be familiar with the maintenance of that specific structure, since function can vary based on design.
3. Do not drain petroleum, oil, or lubricants directly to an OWS. The structures are designed to manage these materials at low and medium concentrations in sanitary sewage, not as slug loads.
4. Do not drain antifreeze, degreasers, detergents, fuels, alcohols, solvents, coolant, or paint to the OWS.
5. Separator compartment covers should be tightly sealed to ensure floor drainage only enters the first compartment of the OWS.
6. Drains should be kept free of debris and sediment to the maximum extent practicable.
7. Spill cleanup materials should be maintained in the area served by the OWS. For more information on spill cleanup and response materials, refer to the SOP for Spill Response and Cleanup Procedures.

OWS Inspection Procedures

Daily inspection of an OWS should include a visual examination of the area served by the OWS for evidence of spills or leaks.

Regular (daily) walk-by inspections of an OWS should include the following:

1. Visually examine the area served by the OWS for evidence of spills or leaks.
2. Inspect the point of discharge (i.e., sewer manhole) for evidence of petroleum bypassing the OWS.
3. Inspect drains for any signs of unauthorized substances entering the OWS.
4. Examine the OWS for signs of leaks or any malfunction.

Annual inspections, which can be performed by contractors as needed, should include the following:

1. Complete tasks noted as appropriate for daily and weekly inspection.
2. Complete the Annual OWS Inspection Checklist, attached, during the inspection.
3. Take the following measurements to benchmark function of the OWS:
 - A. Distance from rim of access cover to bottom of structure
 - B. Distance from rim of access cover to top of sludge layer
 - C. Depth of sludge layer ($C = A - B$)
 - D. Distance from rim of access cover to the oil/water interface
 - E. Distance from rim of access cover to the top of the liquid surface
 - F. Depth of oil layer ($F = D - E$)

OWS Cleaning Procedures

Cleaning of the OWS is required when there has been a spill to the OWS that exceeds ten gallons of oil, one gallon of detergent or solvent, or any material prohibited by the owner of the sanitary sewer. Cleaning is also required when the levels of accumulated sludge and/or oil meet the manufacturer's recommended levels for cleaning. This will vary based on the manufacturer of the OWS. If the manufacturer's recommendations are unknown, the following guidelines are appropriate for determining when to clean:

1. When sludge accumulates to 25% of the wetted height of the separator compartment; or
2. When oil accumulates to 5% of the wetted height of the separator compartment; or
3. When 75% of the retention capacity of the OWS is filled.

Cleaning should be performed a minimum of once per year. When cleaning is required, it shall be performed by licensed OWS maintenance companies. Materials removed from the OWS must be disposed of in accordance with Massachusetts Hazardous Waste Regulations, 310 CMR 30.00.

Documentation of Cleaning and Service

The operator of the premises where the OWS is located shall maintain a log describing the date and type of all inspections, service and maintenance performed in connection with the Separator. Documentation shall include the identity of the inspector (or the identity of the person or entity that performed the service and/or maintenance). Records shall also document the amount of residue removed from the OWS each time it was cleaned, and how removed materials were disposed. This documentation shall be maintained for a minimum of six years.

Attachments

1. Annual OWS Inspection Checklist

Related Standard Operating Procedures

1. Spill Response and Cleanup

This SOP adapted from Central Massachusetts Regional Stormwater Coalition SOP template.