

## **One oil change can create an 8-acre oil slick**

By Tom Boylan

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With instant oil change facilities throughout the country you would think that there would be no way used oil would make its way back into our rivers and creeks. The truth is, some people still change their own oil. It's a simple process that often requires no more than a wrench and a container to catch the old oil. The problem with many do-it-yourself mechanics is they don't recognize the danger even a small amount of oil can place on our environment.

So what's in this stuff that makes it such hazardous waste? Used oil can contain lead, magnesium, copper, zinc, chromium, arsenic, chlorides, cadmium, and the ever-popular polychlorinated biphenyls. These elements are capable of working their way through the earth and into our surface and ground water. The consequences are dramatic. One gallon of used oil can foul a million gallons of drinking water. According to Federal reports, used motor oil accounts for more than 40% of the total oil pollution of our nation's harbors and waterways.

In 1987 California passed the Management of Used Oil Act, making it illegal to dispose of used oil in sewers, drainage systems, surface or ground waters, water courses or marine waters, by domestic incineration, or onto the land or in the trash. The act was passed to turn the public away from polluting and into recycling.

Used oil is recyclable; it can be re-refined or processed into fuel oil. The problem is, not enough oil is being recycled by people who change their own. Even though 70% of all lubricating oil is recycled, only 20% of the motor oil used by the public goes into the recycling loop. That equals 20 million gallons disposed of illegally.

Consider that one oil change from a car can create an 8-acre oil slick. The amount of used oil disposed of improperly by the do-it-yourself auto mechanics every 3 weeks, is equal to the amount of oil spilled by the Exxon Valdez super tanker in Alaska: 11 million gallons. One quart of used oil can contaminate 250,000 gallons of water. Oil films on water can block sunlight and oxygen from reaching water plants and fish. Not recycling used motor oil causes not only environmental damage and a human health hazard; it's also a missed opportunity to reduce our nation's dependency on foreign oil.

As a result of the used oil act, there are over 2200 certified used oil collection centers. There are 84 centers located in Sonoma County [California]. It is recommended that you bring your oil to those centers in clean leak proof containers. Most auto parts stores sell used oil recycling containers, however a clean milk jug will do. It's important not to pour the oil into a container that has previously held household chemicals, like bleach and insecticides. To find the nearest center to you contact the Sonoma County Eco-Desk at 565-DESK.