

FLORIDA FACT SHEET ON USED OIL IN THE ENVIRONMENT

8/15/95

- Because of the many special additives used in the production of motor oil for today's high performance engines, as well as the contaminants picked up in use through the engine, used oil can be more environmentally damaging than crude oil pollution.
- When released on land, used oil tends to migrate through the soil, stressing soil microbes and other small organisms. Loss of these organisms reduces nutrient cycles and can stress the plant foundation of the food chain.
- On water, oil spreads across the surface and eventually settles (as a tar-like substance) on the bottom. In both cases, plants, microbes, invertebrates and other organisms become stressed as the oil clogs breathing mechanisms, interferes with temperature regulation and may accumulate in some tissues, such as muscle.
- Oil contaminants in tissues make the organism unfit for human consumption. If not consumed by humans, the contaminants may be passed along (and concentrated through) the food chain, contributing to environmental degradation.
- 90% of all economically important seafood spend at least part of their life in estuarine systems (coastal areas where sea salt water mixes with run-off fresh water), which are very susceptible to pollution caused by oil spills.
- One pint of oil in a body of water can produce an oil slick that will cover one acre (approximately the area of a football field).
- Oil on water interferes with photosynthesis and gas exchange at the surface, reducing oxygen levels.
- It may take up to twenty years for an aquatic system to recover from an oil spill.
- One part of oil per million parts of water (1 ppm - about one drop of oil in a bathtub full of water) can produce odors and tastes noticeable to humans.
- 35 parts per million (ppm) of oil can cause an oil slick visible to the human eye.
- One gallon of oil can render one million gallons of fresh water (one year's supply for 50 people) undrinkable.