

Disposing of Brake Fluid

When disposing of brake fluid, make sure you stay in compliance with local, state and federal guidelines. Properly disposing of brake fluid is essential for you and the environment.

■ By Alan Shapiro, [HazChem Environmental Corporation](#)

There are quite a few complexities surrounding brake fluid and its disposal. Of course, you want to avoid excessive fines, penalties and any sort of trouble with local, state or federal authorities. So, let's clear up some of those complex issues now.

Can I Minimize My Risk of Accumulating Brake Fluid?

Absolutely. When shopping, buy brake fluid in 8-ounce bottles instead of quarts. Right away, you have already cut down on the possibilities of having excess product going bad.

Is Brake Fluid Toxic?

It is toxic when ingested. So, keep this product away from pets and children. It is alcohol based.

Can I Pour Old Brake Fluid Down the Drain?

No. Absolutely not. Brake fluid should never be poured into a sink, storm drain, septic tank or on the ground. Old brake fluid

removed from cars or trucks is considered hazardous waste and it must be taken to a treatment facility for its proper and legal disposal. If you are having any problem finding a local treatment facility after you do a google search, contact a local tire dealership company. Tire company outlets are almost always in the know of such things, and it is in their best interest to assist potential area consumers.

What Should I Do if Brake Fluid Spills?

Assuming it is a small amount that has spilled, the most common solution to this problem is to clean it all up with kitty litter. Then place the soiled kitty litter in a pan and just leave it alone for a few days, allowing the alcohol to evaporate. Then, assuming the kitty litter is completely dry, the kitty litter can be taken to a household hazardous waste facility or you can simply put it in the trash.

What About Using Other Absorbents or Spill Pads?

Sure, spill pads will work. Paper towels, towels, blue shop towels

Be on the safe side by checking your brake fluid on every oil change. Image courtesy of HazChem.



also work. Another absorbent that works is dirt. Obviously you want to obtain dirt out of the ground first and then pour that dirt onto the brake fluid—you do NOT want to pour brake fluid on dirt in the ground. Kitty litter remains your best bet. However, you do have these other options.

To Save Money and the Possibility of Having Excess Brake Fluid to Dispose, Can I Remix Old Brake Fluid with New Brake Fluid?

No. The major problem with doing so would be the brake fluid, which never comes back and stays in the lines, will absorb water over a period of time. Then, the water will cause corrosion on the steel brake lines. Stay away from mixing. It is always good to save money when you can with regard to vehicles, but this is one area where it is best to worry about safety before saving a few bucks.

How Often Should I Change My Brake Fluid?

There is no set timetable for this. The frequency in which brake fluid needs changing totally varies based on the make, model and year of your vehicle, among other factors. A good rule to stick by is to always check the brake fluid during every oil change. Keep in mind that it is reasonable to expect a change in the brake fluid will be necessary after four years. Plenty of people choose to change their brake fluid every two years and that is not a bad idea either. In the waste industry, with vehicles that do a lot of stop-and-go driving, brake fluid will not last as long as, say, a non-industry vehicle that is on highways much of the time.

Will I Receive Money When I Take My Brake Fluid to Recycling Centers?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Of course, you want a fine stack of green bills in return for your efforts. However, sometimes the main issue is just to wipe your hands of the product itself and be done with things—and if that means you leave without cash, perhaps you will be okay with that. Check around. Sometimes you will find a center that pays, and plenty will not pay. Please take note of this whether you are paid or not: by recycling your brake fluid, you are helping the environment.

Can I Flush the Brake Fluid Down a Toilet?

No, no, no. Remember, brake fluid is flammable and should never be poured down the toilet. If the brake fluid is unused and expired, you can dispose of it by letting it evaporate from a pan of kitty litter.

Will Auto Supply Stores Take Brake Fluid Waste?

Some of them will. Auto supply stores are in business to make a profit and the more people that visit them—for whatever reason that visit may be—the better shot they have at making a profit. Call around. You have nothing to lose. (For large companies in the waste



One sign that your brake fluid may need to be replaced is if your brakes start making any noise at all. Image courtesy of Pat Zeck, HazChem.

disposal business, auto supply stores are not an option for brake-fluid disposal.)

Why is There So Much Conflicting Information Out There Regarding Brake Fluid Disposal?

In today's complex world, with everyone and their uncle giving advice on waste disposal, brake fluid and everything else, there is bound to be some disinformation. However, the disposal procedure can be handled relatively simply and within three or four days. Number 1: fill a large tray or metal pan with about a half-inch of kitty litter. Number 2: pour that brake fluid over the kitty litter. Number 3: leave this all uncovered for three or four days. Number 4: you should be free to handle the disposal in your regular trash.

Proper Disposal

When disposing of brake fluid, make sure you stay in compliance with local, state and federal guidelines. Properly disposing of brake fluid is essential for you and the environment. Brake fluid can be toxic to the central nervous system, liver, kidneys and heart. Handle it with care. And remember: there is no such thing as being too careful. | **WA**

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