



## QUICK BREAK CLEANING AGENTS – Environmental guidance note

- **DO use ‘quick break’ degreasers** and detergents to ensure that they do not interfere with the operation of your oil/water separator. This is a standard condition in ACTEW permits to discharge trade waste to sewer.
- **DO minimise the use of all chemicals** as even bio-degradable, phosphate-free detergents and degreasers have an impact on the environment.
- **DO NOT wash vehicles with any detergent or degreaser in an open area** that drains to the ground or to creeks and rivers via the stormwater system.

### What do the terms ‘quick break’, ‘bio-degradable’ and ‘phosphate-free’ mean?

- **Biodegradable** detergents are **broken down more readily** by organisms in the environment than non-biodegradable compounds but can still cause problems so their use should be minimised.
- **Phosphate-free** detergents **limit the nutrient load in water** that can lead to problems, such as blue-green algae, but may still have a negative impact on the ability of organisms in the water to breed.
- **Quick break degreasers allow oil and water to separate within a few minutes** of their use. This helps your oil separation system to function effectively in removing oil before discharge to sewer. Non-quick break compounds may keep oil and water in suspension for several hours, allowing oil to pass through an oil/water separator and into the sewer or septic system.

### How can you tell the difference?

Check the label or **Material Safety Data Sheet** to check if the cleaning agents you are using are **biodegradable, phosphate-free and quick breaking**.

To test for quick breaking properties, perform **this simple test**:

1. Half fill a jar with clean water and mark the top of the waterline using a permanent marking pen.
2. Draw another line 1-2 cm above the waterline mark, and fill to this line with used oil.
3. Add approx. 1 teaspoon of diluted degreaser/detergent (or ½ teaspoon of concentrate) to the jar, put on the lid and shake vigorously to emulsify the liquids.
4. Set jar aside, and allow 10 minutes for the oily water to settle.

If, after 10 minutes, the oily water emulsion has separated back into its respective lines of clear water and ‘free’ oil, your cleaning agent is quick-breaking. If the liquids remain emulsified and have a white, cloudy appearance then the chemical does not possess quick-break properties.

**For further information contact MTA-ACT on (02) 6241 6266.**

*NOTE: This guidance note has been developed to assist MTA-ACT members to better manage their environmental impacts. However, it remains the responsibility of individual businesses to determine the extent to which various laws apply to them and to take appropriate steps to achieve compliance.*