
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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Protecting Groundwater from Floor Drains and Other Typical Discharges

Why the Concern About Floor Drains and Other Discharges?

The main concern is for the protection of human health. There have been instances of drinking water contamination from improper disposal of wastewater, solvents, oils and various commercial and industrial wastes onto or into the ground in New Hampshire. The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) wants to ensure that the use of floor drains and the discharge of wastewater onto or into the ground do not cause the contamination of groundwater, which is the state's main source of drinking water. Preventing groundwater contamination is also the property owner's concern, because the owner is responsible for preventing – and cleaning up – contamination. When groundwater does become contaminated, cleanup costs can easily run into tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Do I Have to Let NHDES Know About Discharges?

Any regular discharge of non-domestic wastewater to the ground must be registered with, and in some cases would require a permit from, the NHDES Water Division.

Can I Continue to Discharge to the Ground?

While the state does allow some groundwater discharges as long as they are properly registered or permitted (see table of examples on following page), state rules prohibit any discharge to the ground of non-domestic wastewater containing a regulated contaminant¹ without treatment with best available technology. Your first step is to determine whether your wastewater contains regulated contaminants or whether you store or use regulated contaminants in the area served by a floor drain. If the answer is no, you may continue the discharge by registering it with NHDES using the "Registration and Notification Form for Floor Drains and Discharges to Groundwater" located at www.des.nh.gov.

1 What Is A Regulated Contaminant?

State law (RSA 485-C:2 XIII) defines a regulated contaminant as "any physical, chemical, biological, radiological substance or other matter, other than naturally occurring substances at naturally occurring levels, in water which adversely affects human health or the environment." Consult the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for the products you use; see the disposal information in the "Spills or Leaks" section of the MSDS.

What Are My Options?

If the wastewater or the area served by the floor drain **does** contain regulated contaminants, you must choose one of the following five options:

1. Eliminate the discharge; permanently seal the drain to prevent releases to groundwater (the online Discharge Well & Floor Drain Pre-Closure Notification Form can be found at the Groundwater Discharge Program webpage.
2. Eliminate regulated contaminants from the wastewater or, if a floor drain, eliminate regulated contaminants from the area served by the floor drain and register the discharge with NHDES.
3. Connect the drain or discharge line to a municipal sanitary sewer in accordance with NHDES and local regulations.
4. Connect the drain or discharge to a registered holding tank that meets NHDES requirements.
5. Obtain a groundwater discharge permit. This is allowed only if the wastewater receives best available treatment and meets ambient groundwater quality standards prior to discharge.

If you choose options #1-4, you must file the “Registration and Notification Form for Floor Drains and Discharges to Groundwater” with NHDES.

If you intend to continue the discharge as in option #5, contact NHDES for a groundwater discharge permit application.

Discharges Generally Allowed with Registration	Discharges Requiring a Permit	Discharges That Are Not Allowed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beauty salon wastewater. • Kennel wastewater. • Bathroom floor drains. • Non-contact cooling water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car washes. • Non-domestic wastewater from industry or commercial business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor drains where regulated substances are stored. • Laboratory sinks. • Manufacturing process water. • Floor drains at automotive facilities.

How Do I Seal My Floor Drain?

First, you need to be certain that no contaminants have been released to groundwater. If you are not familiar with the property’s history, or if it is possible that regulated contaminants have been released to the ground through the drain, you should contact an environmental consultant to investigate (contact NHDES for a list of consultants). If you are positive that no regulated contaminants were ever discharged to the floor drain, you must fill out the “Discharge Well & Floor Drain Pre-Closure Notification Form” (located on www.des.nh.gov) and submit it to NHDES at least 30 days prior to sealing the floor drain(s) with concrete. However, this does not remove any future liability associated with the drain. It is customary when property is to be sold or refinanced to perform an environmental assessment which may include sampling and laboratory analysis of floor drains as well as other locations where contaminants may have been released.

What About Connecting to a Municipal Sanitary Sewer?

Connections to your municipal sanitary sewer are controlled by the local sewer authority. Contact the local authority regarding restrictions. Some local sewer authorities do not allow connection of floor drains, while others allow connection only with adequate pretreatment (e.g. oil/grit separator) or other controls. If you connect a floor drain previously discharging to the ground or groundwater (e.g., drywell or septic system) to a municipal sanitary sewer, you still need to notify NHDES using the referenced notification form.

What Are the Requirements for Holding Tanks?

NHDES has design standards for holding tanks. For more information, please review fact sheet DWGB-22-8

“Holding Tanks for Floor Drains.”

For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at (603) 271-2513 or by email at dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov

Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of June 2019. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.