



DECANTING

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Decanting is the process of removing recovered water from portable tanks, internal tanks, collection wells or other storage containers to maximize use of available storage capacity for recovered oil. Decanting is most often thought of in the context of large spills to open water; however, it may also be necessary where oil has spilled to ponds, streams or standing water left behind by a flood, rain or thaw. Decanting may be necessary wherever available temporary storage capacity is insufficient to hold the total volume of recovered oil/water mixtures.

Decanting involves a discharge of petroleum-contaminated water that is unlikely to meet Alaska Water Quality Standards (18 AAC 70). In the case of an oil spill to water, State water-quality standards have already been violated, and response efforts must be focused on ways to minimize further environmental damage. A decision by the State On-Scene Coordinator (SOSC) to authorize decanting of hydrocarbon-contaminated water must be based upon a determination that greater environmental damage is likely to result if decanting is not authorized and that there are no practicable alternatives available. This is consistent with AS 46.03.050 and AS 46.04.020, which give the department authority to prevent and abate pollution and to approve the method of cleanup.

The responsible party (RP) must apply to the SOSC for a decanting authorization. An Oil Spill Decanting Application/Authorization Form, which includes standard operating conditions for decanting, may be found on ADEC's Permits Tool web site: www.dec.state.ak.us/spar/perp/permits. A letter providing equivalent information may also be used to request approval. The RP may make a verbal request and receive verbal approval from the SOSC or their designee, but a written application must follow as soon as possible. The SOSC will work with the RP to tailor the conditions of approval to the circumstances of a specific spill.

Decanting will be authorized only when it is essential to the continuing recovery of oil and the SOSC has determined that the net environmental damage will be minimized through this practice. The State's emergency authority to approve decanting in no way relieves regulated operators of the contingency plan requirements of 18 AAC 75 Article 4 relating to emergency storage capacity. Decanting will not be authorized for non-emergency activities, such as vessel washing or boom cleaning, that may occur during a spill response and often result in incidental discharges of oil. Decanting in compliance with the instructions of an SOSC does not require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit (40 CFR 122.3(d)).