

Decanting

Decanting is the process of draining off recovered water from portable tanks, internal tanks, collection wells or other storage containers to increase the available storage capacity for recovered oil. Decanting is most often thought of in the context of large spills to open water; however, it can also be necessary during land-based spill responses where oil is spilled into ponds or streams or when there are large volumes of water from snowmelt during spring thaw. Decanting may be necessary on water or on land if the available temporary storage capacity is insufficient to hold the total volume of recovered oil/water mixtures.

Decanting involves a discharge of petroleum-contaminated water which is virtually certain to exceed the 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 efforts must be focused on ways to minimize further environmental damage. A decision by the SOSC to authorize decanting of hydrocarbon-contaminated water must be based upon the determination that greater environmental damage will result if decanting is not authorized and that there are no other alternatives available within the necessary timeframe. This is consistent with AS 46.03.050 and AS 46.04.020, which gives the Department authority to prevent and abate pollution and to approve the method of cleanup.

The SOSC may authorize decanting of hydrocarbon-contaminated water when a determination has been made that the practice is necessary to minimize environmental damage resulting from an oil spill. When there is an identified responsible party (RP), the RP must apply for authorization to decant in each location it is deemed necessary. An Oil Spill Decanting Application/Authorization Form, which includes some standard operational conditions for decanting, is attached. This form, or letter providing equivalent information, can be used to request approval for decanting. The SOSC will work with the RP to modify the conditions for decanting as appropriate for the individual spill circumstances. Verbal approval can be provided by the SOSC or his or her designee, but must be followed-up by a written application as soon as possible. An example of the form is provided at the end of this section.

Decanting will only be authorized 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 75.425 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 which often result in incidental discharges of oil.