Photographic processing

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Trade waste discharges from photographic processing machines/equipment could harm the sewerage system. The Photographic Uniform Regulations for the Environment (PURE) Code of Practice has been used to develop this guideline.

This guideline applies to:
- waterless and water wash minilabs
- x-ray/microfilm laboratories
- dental/medical/veterinary clinics
- x-ray centres
- hospitals
- graphic arts studios
- schools.

Disposal options for high-silver waste

High-silver (fixer of bleach-fix) solutions are not permitted to be discharged to the sewerage system in any quantity. They must be managed by one of the following:

1. Installation of a silver recovery unit (with proven capability to reliably meet discharge quality standards) for on-site treatment and disposal to the sewerage system.
2. Secure on-site storage, pending collection by an EPA licensed contractor and off-site treatment and disposal.

Pre-treatment requirements for sewer disposal option

- All high-silver solutions must be processed by a silver recovery unit.
- Discharge from the silver recovery unit must not exceed 50mg/l of residual silver.
- Buffer/Balancing/Neutraliser tanks are not required except for hospital photographic applications where silver recovery unit batch discharges exceed 40 litres.
- Buffer tanks are not required for continuous flow through silver recovery unit discharges in hospitals.
- Used water free of silver may be discharged directly to sewer.
- Chromium based cleaning solutions are not permitted.
- All discharges to sewer must comply with a pH of 6-10 units at all times.
- Copper waste pipes are not permitted. Acceptable alternatives are PVC, polyethylene or polypropylene.
Best practice management aspects

- High-silver solutions must be stored in a bunded area and comply with *Bunding and Blind Tank Guideline*.

- A wash water limiter or control system must be installed on all water wash processors so that water is only used when film or paper is being processed.

- The silver recovery unit is serviced by a competent technician in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. Records to verify maintenance and routing performance test results are kept and made available to us on request.

More information


Backflow Prevention Requirements - Office of the Technical Regulator

Restricted Wastewater Acceptance Standards