

The eco-warriors of the oil business

Used motor lubricant is dirty, hazardous stuff. Yet the collection of used oil in South Africa has provided business success stories for many eco-entrepreneurs who are not only making a living, but who are also making a difference to the environment.



Source: Sujin Jetkasettakorn © [123RF](#)

One litre of used oil, containing cancer causing carcinogens and harmful compounds, can contaminate one million litres of water. In South Africa about 350,000 million litres of oil is used every year in machinery and vehicles. While a certain amount of the oil is used up in the tools and machines it lubricates, 120 million litres of collectable used oil is generated annually. This is a substantial amount of harmful contaminant that can make its way into our environment if not responsibly collected for recycling.

The collection and recycling of used oil is an environmental priority – and is required by law through regulations laid down in the Waste Act. It is essential to ensure that it is not being poured into drains, onto the ground, painted onto poles, used as a dust suppressant or dumped into landfill with domestic refuse –practices which allow used oil to pollute the environment.

Fortunately, the proper collection and transport of used oil to refineries for recycling is a thriving, albeit highly competitive business for many eco-entrepreneurs in South Africa, who make it their mission to ensure used oil does not end up in the environment.

The ROSE Foundation (Recycling Oil Saves the Environment) has successfully been driving the collection and recycling of used oil for 25 years – championing the collection of over 1.5 billion litres in this time. The organisation's collector membership base operates all around South Africa, collecting and transporting used oil to refineries for proper processing and recycling.

“The work that these collectors do is essential for the well-being of the environment. It has also provided a sustainable business model for South African entrepreneurs who are willing to get their hands dirty,” says [Bubele Nyiba, CEO of the ROSE Foundation](#).

However, Nyiba explains that the industry has seen many non-compliant used oil collectors operating around the country.

“There are 170 ROSE licensed used oil collectors situated across South Africa, which are audited and managed carefully. They must comply with the rigorous legislation governing waste management in South Africa and spend many hours undergoing hazardous waste management training and attending fire-fighting and first aid courses. The same is not true for the non-compliant fly-by-night collectors.”

“We urge used oil generators to ensure their used oil does not make its way into the environment through irresponsible disposal - we urge generators to ensure they use a ROSE registered collector who complies with legislation and who will ensure that the product is properly processed by a licensed processor. If the generators use collectors that are not registered with the ROSE Foundation, they must at least ensure that those collectors use licensed processors for disposal.”

“The ROSE collectors are the heroes of the industry,” says Nyiba. “They are the ones who go out there and collect every possible drop of used oil that could damage the environment – it’s hard, messy work, but they are making a difference.”

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