

The Dirty Facts About Car Washing

For many, car washing is a spring and summertime ritual. Often, citizens do not know that by washing off all of the grime that accumulates on their vehicles, that they might actually be causing harm to our local waterways.

Water entering storm drains, unlike water that enters sanitary sewers, does not undergo treatment before it is discharged into our waterways. So, when cars are washed on streets and driveways, that dirty water eventually ends up in rivers, streams, creeks, and lakes.

Washing one car may not seem to be a problem, but collectively, car washing activity adds up to big problems for our local water sources. Pollution associated with car washing degrades water quality and also finds its way into sediments, impacting aquatic habitats.

The Problem

Washing your car is only a problem if you do not know where or how to do it correctly. The average homeowner uses 116 gallons.



of water to wash one car. Most commercial carwashes use 60 percent less water for the entire process than a homeowner uses just to rinse one car.

Outdoor car washing has the potential to result in high loads of nutrients, dirt, metals, and hydrocarbons entering our waterways as the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off of cars flows down the driveway and the street. Dirty water containing soap, detergents, residue from exhaust fumes, gasoline, heavy metals from rust, metals and other elements from brake linings, rubber, trace amounts of benzene and chromium, and motor oils can wash off cars and flow directly to storm drains and into the nearest creek or stream where it can harm water quality and wildlife.

Small concentrations of detergents in streams can kill fish and their eggs, as well as inhibit their ability to reproduce. Detergents can also destroy the natural protections fish have against bacteria and parasites and can severely damage a fish's gills.

The phosphates from soap can also cause excess algae to grow in our waterways. Excessive algae growth makes water cloudy, green, unattractive, smelly, and unhealthy for swimming, boating, fishing, or drinking.

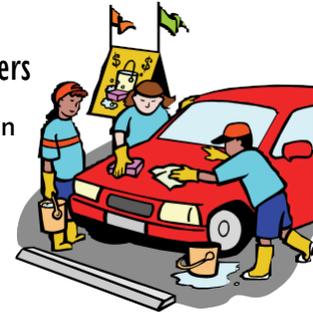
The Best Alternative

The best way to minimize the environmental effects of washing your car at home is to use a commercial car wash facility.

Commercial carwash facilities are required to treat their wash water discharge before releasing it to the sanitary sewer system where the water is treated prior to release back into our water sources. Some facilities even recycle their wash water—reusing it several times before sending it to the sanitary sewer and water treatment. Changing the way you wash your car is something that you can do to make a difference in the quality of our water sources. Proper individual actions can result in significant water quality improvement when carried out by the majority. The individual citizen can easily and economically manage this source of stormwater pollution.

Car Wash Fundraisers

Car Wash Fundraisers can be a significant source of stormwater pollution. These events are usually held in heavily paved areas.



where there is little runoff control or grass to filter out harmful substances. For more information on Car Wash Fundraisers and stormwater pollution, contact the City of Arlington, Environmental Services Department.

What can I do?

Use a commercial car wash facility where wash water is treated and cleaned before it is returned to our waterways.

If you do wash your car at home:

- Wash it on gravel, grass, or other permeable surfaces. Avoid washing on concrete or asphalt unless it drains into a vegetated area.
- Use plain water with a coarse sponge or biodegradable, phosphate-free, water-based cleaners only.
- Use a trigger nozzle on your hose or a bucket to conserve water.
- Always empty wash buckets into sinks or toilets, never into the street or storm drain.

For More Information on Car Washing & Stormwater

Contact

The City of Arlington

Public Works & Transportation

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817-459-6572 or visit

<http://www.arlingtontx.gov/stormwater>

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Car Washing & Stormwater:

The Dirty Truth About Washing Your Car at Home



