

Car Washing can Pollute

Weekend car washes keep your vehicle looking its best but car washing at home can pollute. Soap, dirt, and debris washed away can be carried to local waterways either directly or by the stormwater system. These can harm aquatic life and degrade water quality. While problem pollutants such as oils, grease, and heavy metals can be freed from dirt rims, wheels, engine bays and the undercarriage of a vehicle. Soaps can also harm fish and contribute to algae and aquatic plant blooms. The surfactants in soaps can kill fish eggs and damage the mucous membrane on fish gills. They may also increase the amount of other harmful chemicals absorbed into fish tissue. Phosphates act as a source of nutrients and can contribute to blooms of harmful algae and other aquatic plants. When these plants die and decay, oxygen is consumed from the water body leaving less for fish and other aquatic organisms.

Follow a few simple guidelines to reduce your impact on your local waterways. If possible, use commercial car washing facilities. Unlike the stormwater system, these facilities capture water to be directed to wastewater treatment. If you choose to wash at home, or as part of a fundraiser, it is wise to contact your local municipality for any restrictions or specific guidelines to follow. When selecting a location to wash, try to choose graveled or grassy areas of your yard away from ponds, creeks, or streams. Select an area that does not flow towards your driveway, the road, or any drains you may have installed in your yard. Only use biodegradable soaps or detergents that are phosphate free. Solvents should never be used.

If you must wash on your driveway, direct runoff into your yard using rolled up towels. While washing, washing, turn off the hose when it is not in use to reduce runoff. Once you are finished, dump any buckets of dirty or soapy wash water into your yard or down the sink or tub. Finally, avoid washing your vehicles undercarriage, engine bay, or extremely dirty wheels or rims at home. If vehicle parts need to be washed, this should be done in a closed basin and never in your yard, driveway, parking space along a street, or parking lot.