



Water Quality Outreach Program

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Charity Car Washing

How to do it Right

When cars are washed outdoors in our communities, dirt, grease, and soap flows untreated into local waterways. Most people don't know that storm drains lead directly to streams and creeks and eventually become someone's drinking water source.

Pollutants found in wastewater after a car wash event include:

- Petroleum hydrocarbons (i.e. gasoline, diesel fuel, motor oil, fluids, and lubricants) from automobile engines, leaks, and fuel combustion processes
- Heavy metals from normal wear of auto brake linings (copper), tires, exhaust, and fluid leaks
- Phosphorous- and nitrogen-containing detergents from cleaning vehicles, which cause nutrient loading
- Surfactants from detergents and cleaning formulas (synthetic and organic), which loosen dirt or grease
- Solids from vehicle exteriors and surfaces



If your charity decides that washing cars would be a good idea for a fundraiser, we ask you to consider the following (listed in order of the most environmentally protective practice to the least):

1. Ask a commercial car wash or vehicle dealer if your group can use one of their wash bays so the wash water either drains directly to the sanitary sewer system and gets treated or is recycled within the car wash system itself. Either option keeps the pollutants from running off your site to the street curb and gutter on its way to an inlet that discharges to the stream or creek.
2. Find a location that could be bermed to capture the water and pump it to the sanitary sewer system. A simple and inexpensive submersible pump and hose apparatus may accommodate the amount of water collected during your activity.
3. Find a location that drains to landscaping so the wash water does not reach the storm drain. Alternately, a simple length of garden hose may be able to deflect the runoff from the car washing and direct it to reach a grassy or vegetated area to infiltrate.
4. Find a location that could be bermed to capture the water and pump it to a landscaped area.
5. Use the most environmentally-friendly soap you can and control the application to minimize excess.

To learn more about protecting our local creeks through stormwater management, visit the SEMSWA website (<http://www.semswa.org>). SEMSWA also partners with Stormwater Permittees for Local Awareness of Stream Health (SPLASH) to perform stormwater quality outreach and education (<http://www.splashco.org>).