

Wash Your Car in the Right Place

Many people wash their cars in streets and on driveways. While washing a car at home may seem like a money-saving activity, if not done carefully it can be harmful to our natural resources.

What's the Problem?

Washing your car is not a problem as long as you know where and how to do it. Washing your car at home consumes significantly more water than a commercial car wash. In fact, according to the International Carwash Association, most commercial car washes require an average of about 45 gallons of water per car, whereas home washers typically use between 80 and 140 gallons.

The materials used to wash your car also impact our water quality. The soap washed from your car, along with contaminants such as gasoline and motor oil, flow into storm drains that eventually end up in our streams and the Missouri River. These pollutants negatively impact water quality and harm aquatic life. Most soap includes phosphates that can cause excessive algae growth. As algae decays, it uses up oxygen in the water that fish and other aquatic species need.

Although car wash fundraisers may support good causes, they can be a major source of water pollution. Such events are often held in large, paved areas that do not absorb or filter the runoff before it enters storm drains or streams.

What Can You Do?

Using a commercial car wash is the best way to minimize the effect washing your car has on natural resources and water quality. Most commercial car washes reuse water multiple times before sending it to a Water Protection Facility. Additionally, federal law requires commercial car washes to drain their wastewater into sewers, where it normally receives some treatment, versus simply running across the land.



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If you do wash your car at home, or are planning a fundraising car wash, follow these tips to minimize the negative impacts on water quality:

- Use soap sparingly or use biodegradable, phosphate-free cleaners.
- Use a hose with a nozzle that minimizes water use and runoff.
- Wash on a gravel or grass, which will filter water before it enters storm drains or streams.
- Pour your buckets of soapy water into sinks or toilets when you are done, not in the street.
- Develop a partnership with a commercial car wash facility for fundraising events.