

Why the Concern Over a Carwash?

When cars are washed on impervious pavements such as driveways or parking lots, the road grime and pollutants are transported through stormdrains, culverts, and roadside drainage ditches directly into nearby waterbodies. These are the same waterbodies that we use for swimming, fishing and drinking water. The untreated carwash wastewater contains street litter, nutrients, toxic substances, and other inorganic compounds such as oil, grease, and heavy metals.

Detergents and soaps in carwash wastewater degrade water quality and can be toxic to fish populations (including fish eggs) and plant life. In addition to reducing fish reproductive rates, most detergents contain phosphorus, which promotes weed and algae growth in lakes and streams. Excessive weed growth clogs waterways, which impacts recreation. When algae dies, it sinks and decomposes in a process that removes oxygen from the water. Low oxygen levels can harm fish and other aquatic life.



PHOTO: KEVIN DODGE/MASTERFILE

Become part of the solution to pollution!



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How to Plan a Successful Carwash While Protecting Local Lakes and Streams

Car washes are a great way to raise funds for sports teams, scout troops, schools, clubs, churches and other non-profit organizations. Unfortunately, car wash events can also pollute nearby rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands.



Think green when washing your car and follow these simple recommendations to protect our local water resources.

Tips for Planning a Successful Fundraising Carwash

- Wash cars on grass, gravel, or other permeable surfaces. This helps filter out the soap and other pollutants before the wastewater reaches local waterways.
- If the carwash must be held on a paved surface, block off nearby storm drains during the event and divert the water to a grassy area to facilitate infiltration. Don't forget to remove blockages when the carwash is over.
- Minimize water use by using adjustable hose nozzles and nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
- Use biodegradable, phosphate-free soaps that are specifically formulated for cars.

Additional Tips...

- Use all detergents sparingly.
- Limit washing to the exterior of the vehicle and avoid washing the engines, transmissions, or undercarriages.
- Avoid using metal brighteners, chemical degreasers, and hot water.
- Properly disperse the sudsy puddles that remain after the car wash is over. They contain toxic residues and can attract (and eventually harm) thirsty animals.



A Fundraising Alternative

As an alternative to holding your own carwash, consider scheduling a fundraiser in cooperation with a commercial carwash facility. Contact a neighborhood commercial carwash to learn more about fundraising programs designed to help community groups raise money quickly and easily, while reducing environmental threats to local waterbodies. Wastewater from commercial carwashes is treated before being released into the environment. Commercial facilities also use high-pressure nozzles and pumps that minimize water usage.

