

Remember, you're not just washing your car...



Image Courtesy of Puget Sound Action Team, a cooperative venture between the Washington State Department of Ecology, King County and the cities of Bellevue, Seattle and Tacoma

How does caring for your car affect our waterways? Storm drains found in our streets and roadside ditches lead directly to our lakes and streams. If dirty water from washing our cars gets into the storm drain, it pollutes our local waterways. This “dirty” water contains pollutants such as grease, oil and dirt. Also, most soap contains phosphates and other chemicals that can harm fish and water quality. The phosphates from the soap can cause excess algae to grow. Algae blooms look bad, smell bad, and harm water quality. As algae decays, the process uses up oxygen in the water that fish need.

How Can You Wash Your Car *and* Help Keep Our Environment Clean?

You can help keep our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and groundwater clean by applying the following tips.

Wash it—on the grass. If allowed by your local community, wash your car on the lawn so the ground can filter the water naturally. The lawn will gladly soak up the soapy, dirty water preventing it from entering storm drains or roadside ditches. If you can't use the lawn, try to direct the dirty water towards the lawn and away from the storm drain. Pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink when you're done, NOT in the street. *Please check local ordinances before washing or parking your vehicle on the lawn!*

Minimize it. Reduce the amount of soap you use or wash your car with plain water. Use a hose nozzle with a trigger to save water when you don't need it. Avoid using engine and wheel cleaners or degreasers.

Use a car wash. Best of all; take your vehicle to a commercial car wash, especially if you plan to clean the engine or the bottom of your car. Most car washes reuse wash water several times before sending it to the sanitary sewer system for treatment.

In recent years sources of pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced. Now more than 60 percent of water pollution comes from things like residential car washing, cars leaking oil, fertilizers from farms, lawns, and gardens, pet waste and failing septic tanks. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water too, and that adds up to a pollution solution!

Having a clean environment is of primary importance for our health and economy. Clean waterways provide recreation, commercial opportunities, fish habitat, and add beauty to our landscape. All of us benefit from clean water - and all of us have a role in getting and keeping our lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater clean. For more easy steps on protecting our lakes and streams, visit www.mywatersheds.org.