

# BEST PRACTICES



## Clean Cars, Clean Streams

What do clean cars and clean streams have in common? The answer is water. When done *incorrectly*, the polluted rinse water that came off the dirty car can end up in local streams.

### What's the Problem With Washing My Car?

There's no problem with washing your car, but how and where you wash your car does matter. If you wash your car in your driveway or in the street, the grimy soapy water that washes off your car travels down the driveway and street and into the stormwater catch basin (stormdrain). Contrary to popular belief, this dirty wash water does not get cleaned at a wastewater treatment plant before it enters into the nearest stream, lake or Puget Sound.

Dirty car wash water contains toxic pollutants from the car and the soap. According to a recent study done on residential car washing in Federal Way\*, staff estimated that residents annually deposit 190 gallons of gasoline, diesel and motor oil, 400 pounds of phosphorous and nitrogen, 60 pounds of ammonia, 2,200 pounds of surfactants and 30,000 pounds of solid waste into the city's stormwater drainage system. These contaminants can harm fish and wildlife; and pollute streams, lakes and Puget Sound.



### How Can I Keep My Car and Streams Clean?

The best way to keep streams clean when you wash your car is to take it to a commercial car wash. The dirty water from commercial car washes is often pre-treated onsite and piped to a wastewater treatment facility. In addition, commercial car washes are better for the environment compared to using a hose at home because they use water-efficient equipment.

If you do wash your car at home, you can protect our streams by washing your car on the lawn (be careful not to park over your drinking well or septic drainfield), where the dirty wash water can seep into the ground. Choose a low- or no-phosphate biodegradable car wash soap, and make sure you empty your wash buckets in sinks or toilets that are connected to the sanitary sewer system or pour the dirty wash water over your lawn.

*Lawns act like a filter for car wash water. Grass and other plants can absorb some of the chemicals and other contaminants in car wash water, thus reducing the amount of pollutants that could end up in the storm drain and our local*



### What about Charity Car Washes?

Charity car washes are intended to raise money for good causes, yet they are often unknowingly held at locations where the dirty wash water can run off into stormwater catch basins and eventually into our streams, lakes and Puget Sound.

There are options for raising money from a charity car wash that will keep our streams clean. **The best alternative is to sell vouchers for commercial car washes.** Many local commercial car wash businesses participate in the Puget Sound Car Wash Association’s Car Wash Fundraiser Tickets or have their own offerings (such as free car wash bay, tickets, proceeds from a day of car washes) to assist local groups with fund raising. Find out more by contacting a local car wash business or go to [www.charitycarwash.org](http://www.charitycarwash.org)



The next best alternative is to make sure the site at which you plan to hold your charity car wash is a *Clean Cars, Clean Streams* site. A *Clean Cars, Clean Streams* car wash site is a site that has been pre-approved by staff at the local stormwater utilities. These sites offer appropriate water treatment, which help prevent polluted car wash water from contaminating streams. If you are planning a charity car wash, simply call one of the numbers listed below. Staff will help you determine which sites are approved sites.

- City of Lacey ..... 360-438-2687
- City of Olympia..... 360-570-3794
- City of Tumwater..... 360-754-4148

### Other Alternatives to Charity Car Washes

- Sell eco-friendly products such as reusable shopping bags or water bottles. Try featuring your own artwork or sports team logo.
- Sell local coupon books.
- Partner with a local business to host a bingo or trivia night and share a portion of profits from the evening.
- Host a fun run at your school. You can even add obstacle courses.
- Hold an auction. Include items such as themed gift baskets or lunch with senior staff members. If you’ve had success with environmentally friendly fundraisers, we would love to hear about it! Please contact the Stream Team coordinator in your jurisdiction so we can share your experience in an upcoming newsletter.

*\*Residential Car Washwater Monitoring Study, July 2009, Public Works Department, Surface Water Management Division. [www.cityoffederalway.com](http://www.cityoffederalway.com)*

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