

Charities and groups planning a fundraising car wash event should plan to not harm water quality or violate clean water regulations.



Locations and facilities may need to be approved by local permitting agencies. Wash water should not be allowed to simply flow into a storm drain.

Some alternatives:

Develop a partnership with a commercial car wash facility. Sell tickets (for a commission) to the facility instead of washing cars.

Car wash water containment kits (SudSafe® is one brand, others are on the market) are available that can capture wash water and disperse it to a vegetated area. Some cities have begun to keep these to loan for fundraising activities.

At the very least, hold the event where vegetation will filter out harmful substances before the dirty water reaches a waterway.

Ontario-Wayne Stormwater Coalition Members

Town of Victor
Town of Farmington
Town of Macedon
Town of Ontario
Town of Walworth
Village of Victor
Wayne County Highway Department
Ontario County Highway Department
Ontario County Soil and Water Conservation District
Wayne County Soil and Water Conservation District



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Clean Car, Clean Water



Protecting Water Reducing Pollution



The car is clean, how clean is the water?

Washing grime off the car may be causing harm to local waterways.

Water that runs off the wash job may contain detergent or other cleaning compounds, residue from exhaust fumes, gasoline, metals from rust and brakes, oils, tar, deicing salts and soil.

When cars are washed on streets, driveways or parking lots, the dirty water enters a storm drain and is carried directly to a stream or other water body.

Storm drains do not connect to sanitary sewers, so the dirty water is not treated.

Discharging anything into a storm drain is the same as putting it directly into the stream.

Pollution from car washing degrades water quality and settles out in lake and stream bottoms, harming aquatic life.

Facts About Car Washing (and pickups too)

Washing a car uses a lot of water—from 80 to 140 gallons of water if the garden hose keeps running.

Commercial car washes use much less water and some water is collected, filtered and reused. Permits ensure safe discharge of waste water and sludge.



Self-service car washes where the runoff water is captured and treated are often the least expensive option—and the least damaging to the environment. If the thrill of getting wet and shining up your own ride appeals to you, this is the way to go, and uses only about 15 gallons of water.

Even commercial drive-through systems still use much less water (about 35-50 gallons) than washing at home, and the water is cleaned and reused.

If you really must wash at home...

Get off the pavement. If you park on a flat, permeable surface such as your lawn, gravel or dirt; microbes in the soil will break down some of the pollutants in the wash water and prevent them from entering the storm drain.

Choose biodegradable soap formulated for vehicle washing. Look for water based, chlorine and phosphate free soap. Mop up the puddles if any remain after you're finished to ensure the safety of pets or other thirsty animals.

Minimize water usage. Use a spray nozzle with flow restriction to minimize water volume and runoff.

If you use a wash bucket, empty it into a mop sink or toilet so the waste will go to a sewage treatment plant.

Read about fundraising car washes on the back page

