

The Impact of Car Washing on Our Rivers and Bay...

When we wash the grime off our cars, it flows down the street and into the storm drain. This runoff carries soap, sediment, oil, and grease. Once the runoff gets into the storm drainage piping system, it directly discharges without treatment into the nearest lake, river, harbor, or bay.



...and Why It Matters

Polluted stormwater can harm fish, wildlife, and plants, and it can even contaminate drinking water. The U. S. EPA estimates that at least 50% of our nation's water pollution is caused by polluted stormwater runoff. If every vehicle (some 2.3 million) in the U.S. was washed once a month with 25 gallons of water (5 buckets), over 70.5 billion gallons of polluted water could enter the stormwater system every year. You can help. Use the tips provided in this brochure to help ensure that our waterways remain clean.

The Law

Joint Base Langley Eustis is required to obtain a stormwater permit under the Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, or VPDES. The goal of this permit is to reduce pollutants found in storm water runoff from urbanized areas to the "maximum extent practicable."

Joint Base Langley Eustis has prepared this educational brochure to meet a requirement of their VPDES permit administered by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Contact Information

For more information, contact a Joint Base Langley Eustis Water Media Manager at 757-878-5218 (Fort Eustis) or 757-764-1141 (Langley AFB).

For additional information, see the Commonwealth of Virginia's VPDES Permits, Fees and Regulations website at:

<http://www.deq.virginia.gov/Portals/0/DEQ/Water/PollutionDischargeElimination/VAG75FactSheet2012.pdf>

Environmental Protection Agency's information on vehicle washing:

https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/KSMO_CarWashing.pdf

Florida DEP's Best Practices for Mobile Vehicle Washing:

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/wastewater/iw/docs/bmps4mobile-vehicle-washing.pdf>



Outdoor Vehicle Washing



Mobile Car Washes: Legal Requirements

Discharges from mobile car washes to the storm sewer system are not allowed at Joint Base Langley Eustis. Owners of mobile vehicle washes may apply for coverage under a permit issued by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality; however the usual mode of operation for these operations is to prevent the discharge of wash waters to surface waters or the storm sewers. Permit coverage as a mobile operator would require each discharge location to be identified on the registration statement as a separate outfall.

JBLE and DEQ urge mobile car wash owners to avoid a discharge to state waters or storm drains by applying technologies to collect wash water and dispose of it properly, recycle it, or use best management practices (evaporation, blocking storm drain entrances, use of permeable surfaces, etc.). Many ideas to avoid a discharge are covered in this brochure and available online.



Car Washing at Home and for Charity

Washing personal vehicles at home or at a volunteer/ charity event is not regulated. Thus, runoff from these activities does not need to be captured by recycling or catchment devices. Even so, there are several easy ways to help reduce stormwater pollution while you work:

- If possible, use a commercial car wash.
- Commercial car washes have recycling systems or discharge to the sanitary sewer system, which goes to a treatment plant.
- Wash your car on gravel, grass, or other permeable surfaces. These surfaces serve as a filter or a sponge, trapping pollutants from the wash water.
- Block off the storm drain inlets during charity car wash events or use an inlet insert to catch wash water.
- Divert soapy water from car washes into a sanitary sewer drain. If this is not feasible, divert car wash water onto grass or landscaping to provide filtration.
- Use hoses with nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
- Use only biodegradable soaps.

Using these simple rules at home and for charity events helps keep a clean and healthy living environment. This is not only good for us and future generations, it makes for a healthy ecosystem.



The Best Option

Outdoor car washing has the potential to result in high loads of nutrients, metals and hydrocarbons during dry weather conditions in many watersheds, as the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off our cars flows down the street and into the storm drain.

Car washing is a common routine for residents and a popular way for organizations such as scout troops, schools, and sports teams to raise funds. This activity is not limited by geographic region, but its impact on water quality will be greatest in more urban areas with higher concentrations of automobiles.

Always consider using a commercial car wash as your first alternative. A properly designed car wash is connected to a sanitary sewer that carries the dirty water to a wastewater treatment plant. Trading a few dollars for a healthy stormwater system is one deal that everyone can live with.

