

What you can do:

Use commercial car wash facilities where wash water is treated and cleaned before it is returned to our streams.

If you do wash your car at home:

- ◆ wash it on gravel, grass or other permeable surfaces
- ◆ use plain water with a coarse sponge or biodegradable, phosphate-free soaps
- ◆ use a trigger nozzle on your hose or a bucket to conserve water and minimize runoff
- ◆ always empty wash buckets into sinks or toilets

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Greener Car Washing



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Funded by a grant from the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

Did you know that storm water runoff in Santa Clara County is not treated, but goes directly into our streams and creeks? That is why it is important to insure that pollutants such as pet waste, automotive fluids, soaps and dirt from car washing, trash, garbage and chemicals do not end up in the storm drains.

Water flowing over the land can pick up an array of contaminants that can run off into our streams and creeks either directly or through our storm sewer systems. The Environmental Protection Agency has determined that pollution from this runoff is the largest cause of water quality problems in the United States.

Everyday personal actions you take can have a significant impact on the water quality of our local streams and creeks. Remember that while the individual household might contribute only minor amounts of pollution, the combined effects of a neighborhood or city are serious.



Greener Car Washing

Changing the way you wash your car can help. Outdoor car washing has the potential to result in high loads of nutrients, dirt, metals and hydrocarbons as the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off our cars flows from the driveway to the gutter and into the storm drain. These pollutants degrade the water quality of our streams and endanger the wildlife that lives in or near the streams.

Small concentrations of detergents in our streams can kill fish and their eggs, as well as inhibit their ability to reproduce. Detergents also add to the problems of aquatic life by lowering the surface tension of water. Fish are then much more likely to absorb organic chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilizers. Detergents can destroy the fish's external mucus layers that protect them from bacteria and parasites and can severely damage the fish's gills.

In addition to the detergents, driveway car wash discharges consist of dirt, grease, oil, other automotive fluids, metals and other elements from brake linings, rust, rubber, trace amounts of benzene and chromium, as well as other pollutants. All of these pollutants cause serious water quality problems in our streams and creeks.



Commercial car wash facilities, on the other hand, are required to treat their wash water discharge before releasing it to sanitary sewer systems where the water is cleaned prior to release back into our surface waters. Additionally, most commercial car washes use 60% less water in the entire washing process than simply rinsing your car at home. Most recycle their water.

Changing the way you wash your car is something that everyone can do to make a difference in the quality of our surface waters. Proper individual actions can result in significant water quality improvement when carried out by the majority. Unlike some forms of stormwater pollutants, the individual citizens of our community can easily and economically manage this source of stormwater pollution.