RESPONSIBLE CAR WASHING

GREATER LANSING REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR STORMWATER MANAGEMENT
www.mywatersheds.org

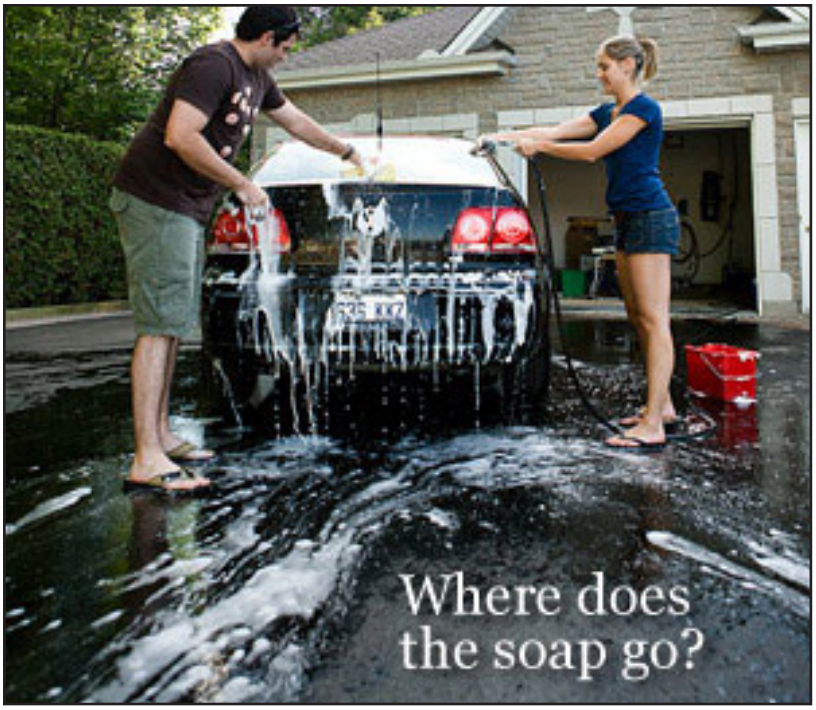
There's no problem with washing your car, it just matters how and where you do it. Storm drains in our streets and roadside ditches lead directly to our lakes and streams, so when you wash your car in the driveway or on the road, the soap — together with dirt, wax, oil, grease, grime, and grit — runs from your car into nearby storm drains. From there, the mix of soap and dirty water flows through the storm sewer system and directly into our rivers, streams, wetlands, and lakes. This impacts water quality for both humans and aquatic life.

When water from car washing enters a waterway, it harms fish and impairs water quality. The phosphates from the soap cause excess algae to grow, which reduces oxygen levels as it decays. The soap's surfactants damage fish gills and kill their eggs. Even if soap isn't used, the oils, heavy metals, brake linings, and rust washed from vehicles enter storm drains and impact our shared surface water resources.

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

The best way to minimize your environmental impact is to use a commercial car wash, especially if you plan to clean the engine or the bottom of your car. The average homeowner uses 116 gallons of water to wash a car, but commercial operations use 60 percent less water for the entire process than a homeowner uses just to rinse! Most car washes also reuse wash water several times before sending it to the sanitary sewer system for treatment, ensuring pollution stays out of our waterways.

Looking for other options? 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 water, preventing it from entering storm drains or roadside ditches. If you can't use the lawn, try to direct dirty water toward the lawn and away from nearby storm drains. Pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink when you're done, NOT into the street. Again, please be sure to check local ordinances before washing or parking your vehicle on the lawn!



You should also take care to minimize 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 and avoid using engine cleaners or degreasers.

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 smaller sources like residential car washing; cars leaking oil; fertilizers from farms, lawns, and gardens; pet waste; and failing septic tanks. Even these small-scale sources add up to a big pollution problem, but everyone can make minor changes to help clean up our water and be part of the pollution solution!