

MESSAGE FROM OUR TOWN ENGINEER

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Residential Car Washing

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. In many cases, the polluted runoff from the outdoor washing of automobiles enters the storm drain system, and eventually the nearest stream. Outdoor car washing may create a polluted runoff that contains high amounts of nutrients, metals, and hydrocarbons. Commercial car wash facilities often recycle their water or are required to treat their wash water discharge prior to release to the sanitary sewer system, so most Stormwater impacts from car washing are from residents, businesses, and charity car wash fund raisers that discharge polluted wash water to the storm drain system. According to the surveys, 55 to 75 percent of households wash their own cars, with the remainder going to a commercial car wash. Sixty percent of residents could be classified as “chronic car-washers” who wash their cars least once a month. Between 70 and 90 percent of residents reported that their car wash water drained directly to the street and, presumably, to the nearest stream. It has been estimated that 25 percent of the population of the United States may be classified as chronic car washers, which translates into about 27 million potential residential car wash polluters (Center for Watershed Protection, 1999). Surveys also indicate that the average citizen does not fully understand the connection between their yard, the street, the storm sewer, and the streams. For example, a Roper survey found that just 22 percent of Americans know that Stormwater runoff is the most common source of pollution of streams, rivers, and oceans.

So, what can you do to reduce the impact of car wash runoff on storm drains and our streams? Consider the following:

- Use a commercial car wash
- Wash your car on gravel, grass, or other permeable surfaces. However, be very careful and do not wash your car where your septic leech fields are, you could end up damaging them.
- Turn your hose nozzle off when you are not rinsing the car
- Use only biodegradable soaps