



Car Washing and Pollution Prevention

Most people aren't aware that by washing their car in their home driveway they may be polluting their creeks. The best way to wash your car is at a professional car washing facility, where water is recycled or sent to the sanitary sewer system. Anything that falls on or near the street enters a storm drain inlet and flows directly through the storm drain pipe to local bodies of water like creeks or streams. Drips, leaks and spills of soap, oil, grease, gas, antifreeze and other toxics used by automobiles are washed off and carried by rainfall or water. Soap from wash water, entering a creek through the storm drain, is harmful to aquatic life and plants. Even biodegradable soaps will biodegrade slowly and will negatively impact aquatic life.

If your budget or preferences dictate you clean your car at home, it can still be done without polluting your local creek. Automobiles can be washed regularly without soap and lots of water by wiping the exterior with a wet cloth. Washing the car on the lawn will give time for the rinse water to soak into the dirt and the soap to break down into less harmful pollutants. Using minimal water and soap will also reduce the pollutant load.

Without an accessible and sufficiently sized lawn you can wash your car on the street and reduce washing pollutants to the creek by following these steps:

- Use a minimum of water and soap and a maximum of scrubbing
- Clean the car using two buckets of water, one for soapy water and one for rinse water
- Wipe the car or sections of the car with a sponge using a minimum of soapy water to reduce drips onto the pavement
- Then wipe the car down with sponge and rinse water again using a minimum of rinse water and drips to the pavement
- When finished, both buckets are dumped into the sanitary sewer through a sink or toilet. You will most likely use several buckets of rinse water
- Another option would be to block the street gutter with plastic bags filled with dirt (like a sandbag) allowing the rinse water to pond up, where it can be collected with a wet/dry-vac for disposal to the sanitary sewer. Rinse the area to ensure all the soap and other pollutants is collected for disposal to a sink.

Contact Information

- For more information on storm water and the City's storm drain system call the City of Santa Rosa's Water Department at (707) 543-4200, and ask for Storm Water.
- For proper disposal questions on hazardous materials and recycling call Eco-Desk at (707) 565-DESK (3375), or visit Recycle Now.
- Report spilled material by calling (707) 543-3800 especially if it reaches the storm drain system.
- If spilled material contains hazardous materials call 911 or (707) 528-5151 (Fire Dispatch).