

Stormwater Runoff

As authorized by the Clean Water Act, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program controls water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the United States. Industrial, municipal, and other facilities must obtain permits if their discharges go directly to surface waters.

When it rains, storm water flows over driveways, lawns, sidewalks, roads and parking lots on its way to the nearest entrance into the storm drain system.

In most cases the storm water system discharges this polluted runoff to the nearest lake, creek, stream or ultimately a river with NO treatment.

This is unlike the water that goes down the toilet or sink in your home which discharges to the wastewater system for treatment.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, polluted storm water runoff is the nation's greatest threat to clean water.

Storm water pollution is toxic to fish and wetland wildlife.

It threatens all of us who use and enjoy our most valuable resource – **WATER!**



COMMUNITY CAR WASH EVENTS: Water Quality Best Management Practices



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Car Washes

A car wash is a great way to have fun while raising funds for your school or community group. But did you know that if soapy water enters the storm drain system it will flow directly to the nearest creek or lake? Soap (even if it is biodegradable) is a pollutant that can be harmful to fish and other aquatic life that depend on clean water for their survival. In addition to soap, car wash water can carry pollutants such as dirt, oil, and other automotive fluids into our storm drain system and into local creeks and Clear Lake.

It is possible to host a car wash that doesn't pollute creeks and the lake. You just have to select a site where the wash water can be disposed of without it entering a storm drain or onto a public street. The City of Lakeport can help you determine if the site is appropriate and offer suggestions on how to dispose of the water.



How to Keep Car Wash Water from Entering the Storm Drain

There are several ways you can do this. Use your imagination and the suggestions below to figure out what will work best.

- Wash the cars in a place where the natural drainage pattern will route wash water into a vegetated area such as a lawn or vacant lot. This will provide for natural filtration and keep the soap, dirt and oils out of the storm drain and finally out of local creeks and Clear Lake. Be sure to have the owner's permission if wash water is draining onto a neighboring property. You might be able to use sand bags, rolled towels, hoses, or other materials to divert the surface runoff to the vegetated area.
- Another way is to seal off the storm drain, collect the water, and use a small sump pump to pump the water to a vegetated area. Sump pumps are available at equipment rental stores. Perhaps someone in your group may be willing to loan theirs out. Sump pumps should only be running when water is available, otherwise the motor will overheat. You will need a hose to carry water from the pump to a vegetated area. An extension cord will probably be needed along with a source of electricity. A broom may also be handy to sweep water towards the pump or to spread the water out so it will evaporate.

How do I seal off a storm drain?

Most parking lots have grated inlets placed in low areas. If the grate can be removed, remove it and place a sheet of heavy plastic over the inlet that extends beyond the edges. Replace the grate. Then put a heavy rubber mat or a lighter rubber mat with weights on it over the grate. Be sure to form a tight, waterproof seal that will keep all water out of the storm drain. If the grate cannot be removed, place plastic sheeting and then rubber mats over the top of it. Rolled up towels can be placed around the edge of the mat to increase its water tightness.

Some parking lots drain through openings in the side of the curbs called catch basins. Catch basins can be sealed off with a sheet of heavy plastic topped with sand bags or other weights. Again, be sure the seal is tight before you start washing cars.

If the car wash site drains into the street and then into the storm drain, be aware that sealing storm drains in the street is not allowed. It can create a traffic hazard and also endanger those running the pump. You must use a catch basin on private property with the owner's permission. Sites without an on-site storm drain system should not be used for community car washes.

Ending the Car Wash

After all vehicles have been washed, a final parking lot rinse with water to the sealed drains should be performed. Soapy residue can pollute the creeks and lake at the first rain.

Other Important Tips

Purchase soaps, cleaners or detergents labeled "non-toxic," "phosphate free," and/or "biodegradable." However, realize that using these products alone is not enough; even biodegradable products can harm aquatic life over the long term. The safest products for the environment are vegetable-based or citrus-based soaps.

Ensure that one or more adults are responsible for making sure that all participants follow these suggestions:

- ✓ Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area.
- ✓ Shake car mats into a trash can or vacuum them. Do not shake dirt from car mats directly onto the ground.
- ✓ Conserve water and reduce runoff by using a spray nozzle with an automatic shut off and shutting off the hose when not in use. Do not allow water to run continuously.
- ✓ Use half the manufacturer's recommended dosage for soap (e.g., ½ capful instead of 1 capful).
- ✓ Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash process, rather than adding more soap directly to rags or sponges. Wring sponges and rags into buckets, not onto the ground.
- ✓ Always empty buckets of dirty wash water onto landscaped areas where the water cannot reach a storm drain.