

STORMWATER COALITION

June

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Information provided by the Stormwater Coalition, a committee of the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG)

The Stormwater Coalition is a committee of the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (419.241.9155). The coalition is composed of the following members:

Lucas County
(419.213.4500)
Wood County
(419.354.9000)
City of Bowling Green
(419.354.6227)
City of Maumee
(419.897.7150)
City of Northwood
(419.693.9327)
City of Oregon
(419.698.7047)
City of Rossford
(419.666.0210)
City of Sylvania
(419.885.8957)
City of Toledo
(419.245.1050)
City of Waterville
(419.878.8100)
Village of Haskins
(419.823.1911)
Village of Holland
(419.865.7104)
Village of Millbury
(419.836.9671)
Village of Ottawa Hills
(419.536.1111)
Village of Walbridge
(419.666.1830)
Jerusalem Township
(419.836.8921)
Lake Township
(419.838.6536)
Middleton Township
(419.823.1480)
Monclova Township
(419.865.7862)
Perrysburg Township
(419.872.8861)
Spencer Township
(419.865.2883)
Springfield Township
(419.865.0239)
Sylvania Township
(419.882.0031)
Washington Township
(419.726.6621)
Waterville Township
(419.878.5176)
Home Builders Association
(419.473.2507)

Outdoor Car Washing

During warm summer months, many of us enjoy hand washing our vehicles at home. However, when a car is washed on a paved surface like in a driveway or in a parking lot the soap, detergent, automotive fluids, oil, and roadway dirt that gets rinsed from the vehicle flow straight into nearby storm drains. These storm drains lead directly to streams, rivers, Maumee Bay, and ultimately Lake Erie, where car wash water flows untreated. This polluted runoff can cause significant harm to aquatic plant life, fish, and other animals.



Photo Courtesy of City of Roseville, CA

Since commercial car wash water is treated through the sanitary sewer system, using a commercial car wash is the best way to avoid pollution while keeping your car clean. Most car washes offer low-cost basic car wash options for those on a budget.

If you still prefer to wash your car at home, following a few simple rules will help to minimize harm to our valuable water resources.

- 1) Never wash your car on a driveway or parking lot. Instead, wash your car on grass or gravel to allow the soapy, dirty water to infiltrate into the soil rather than run it directly to storm drains.
- 2) Minimize soap usage. Large amounts of soap are not necessary for a clean car and using too much soap requires more water to rinse it clean. Mix a mild solution of biodegradable soap and water in a bucket to sponge scrub your vehicle.
- 3) Minimize water usage. Rinse your car clean with a hose fitted with a nozzle that will shut off when not in use.
- 4) Don't wash often. Let the summer rains do most of the washing. Save the car washing for winter months when cars accumulate salts and road debris.



See the next page for guidance on fundraiser car washes.



Photo Courtesy of Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership

Car Wash Fundraising

While charity car washes are a popular way for organizations such as scout troops, schools, and sports teams to raise funds, most organizations are unaware of their impact on local water resources. A single fundraising event can dump thousands of gallons of soapy, oily, and gritty water into local streams. Consider holding your fundraiser at a local car wash or selling car wash vouchers. If you do choose to host your own hand car wash event, please follow this guidance from the Maryland Department of Environment:

- Selecting the site for your car wash is very important. When talking to property owners of shopping centers, schools, or churches where you are considering holding the event, ask them where the water flows from the storm drains on the property. The best locations will have some stormwater management controls in place. These controls include grass swales, sand filters, oil and grit separators, stormwater management ponds, and wetlands that treat stormwater before it is discharged to a stream.
- If there are no stormwater management controls in place, choose a site where the wash water can soak into grass, gravel, or be diverted to nearby landscaping. This will allow the wash water to filter through the vegetation and/or soil instead of flowing directly into a storm drain. Absorbent pads, which can be purchased at automotive shops, can also be placed in the curb or grass swale to catch oils and other chemicals.
- Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area.
- Do not use acid-based wheel cleaners or engine degreasers.
- A soap-free wash is best for the environment. If you do use soaps, use cleaners or detergents labeled “non-toxic,” “chlorine-free”, “phosphate-free,” or “biodegradable.” The safest products for the environment are vegetable or citrus-based products. Using biodegradable soap does not lessen its immediate environmental impact – it simply means that the soap will degrade in time. A flush of “biodegradable” soap suds will still harm fish or invertebrates in your local stream.
- Hold a meeting with car wash volunteers to explain the following methods for reducing environmental impact:
 - Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash rather than adding soap directly to rags or sponges.
 - Wring sponges and washrags into buckets, not the ground.
 - Conserve water by using a spray nozzle with an automatic shut-off.
 - Always empty buckets into the sanitary sewer system (e.g. sinks or toilets), NOT down the storm drain.
 - Remember to clean up after the car wash fundraiser. Have a volunteer walk the perimeter of the site to pick up trash and debris and dispose of it properly.

Source: Maryland Department of Environment.