

CAR WASHING FACTS

Outdoor car washing results in large amounts of nutrients, metals, and hydrocarbons flowing into waterways, as the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off our cars flows down the street, into the storm drain and into streams. That polluted runoff is especially detrimental to streams during dry weather conditions. Commercial car-wash facilities are required to recycle and treat their wash water prior to discharging it to the sanitary sewer system where it receives additional treatment at the wastewater treatment plant before it is ultimately discharged to Bellingham Bay. Most impacts from car washing are from residents, businesses and car-wash fundraisers discharging polluted wash water directly into the storm drain system (CWP, 1999).

Water consumed per vehicle at a commercial car wash:

<u>Type of Wash</u>	<u>Gallons per Car</u>
Self-service	8 – 18
Conveyor Wash	14 – 60
In-bay automatic	10 – 50

Home car washing **16 – 180 *most of it wasted down the driveway***

When washing vehicles at home, a sump pump can be placed in the storm drain where the wash water flows. The pump should pump the wash water through a hose to the sanitary sewer. Another alternative is to wash the car on a pervious surface such as a lawn or vegetated area so the wash water can soak into the ground, where pollutants are filtered out.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Like many municipalities, the City of Bellingham uses local streams to convey stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff transports a host of pollutants to streams, lakes and bays. Non-point pollutant sources include automobiles, household chemical uses, pets, lawns and gardens, and business practices. Typically, urban stormwater runoff from driveways and roads is not treated before flowing into creeks. Nor is there an opportunity for “natural treatment” by infiltrating directly into soil layers due to the large quantities of impervious surfaces typically found in urban environments. Large amounts of impervious surfaces increase peak volumes in streams and decrease the dry month base flows, creating a “flashy” stream system with very high flows and very low flows, both of which cause problems for fish.

THE LAW

Regulations regarding protection of waterways from polluted storm water runoff have increased. Some of these regulations are:

Bellingham Municipal Code

Chapter 15.42.050, paragraph 3 of the Bellingham Municipal Code states that “Illicit discharges to stormwater drainage systems are prohibited.” Illicit discharge is defined as all non-stormwater discharges to stormwater drainage systems that cause or contribute to a violation of state water quality, sediment quality or ground water quality standards, including but not limited to sanitary sewer connections, industrial process water, interior floor drains, car washing and graywater systems.

Puget Sound Water Quality Management Plan (PSWQMP)

Adopted in 1992, this regional plan sets requirements for municipal stormwater programs, with the goal of reducing pollution in Puget Sound. Key elements include identification and ranking of pollution sources, minimum requirements for new development and redevelopment, operation and maintenance programs, best management practices (BMPs) for stormwater, and education.

NPDES Phase 2 Municipal Stormwater Permits

A program under the federal Clean Water Act, these permits have similar requirements to the PSWQMP. In addition, they mandate Best Management Practices, (BMPs), and measurable goals for public education and involvement; detection and elimination of illicit discharges; construction of stormwater runoff control measures; post-construction stormwater management; and pollution prevention for municipal operations.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

The ESA protects chinook salmon, bull trout, and their habitat through wide-reaching measures—still under development—to address changes in stream flow and protect aquatic habitat and water quality. In the absence of a comprehensive surface water management program, releasing polluted stormwater or authorizing development that changes stream flows or affects habitat could be considered an illegal “take” of an endangered species.



The City recommends utilizing a commercial car wash whenever possible as a way citizens can help reduce the amount of pollution in our lakes, streams and Bellingham Bay.

