Montgomery County Government
Building and Codes Department

Phone
931-648-5718

350 Pageant Lane Suite 309
Clarksville, TN 37040

Fax
931-553-5121

Pollution Prevention: Car and Equipment Washing

Outdoor car washing has the potential to result in the discharge of large amounts of nutrients, metals and hydrocarbons into the environment. During dry weather conditions, the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off our cars flows down the street and into drainage ditches or storm drains. In most cases, the waste water used to wash cars will find its way into the local watershed, usually with detrimental effects on both aquatic habitat and the environment in general. Commercial car wash facilities are required to recycle their water or pre-treat their waste water prior to discharge to the sanitary sewer system, so most storm water impacts from car washing are from residents, businesses and charity car wash fundraisers that discharge car and equipment wash water to the storm drain system.

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. Proper planning and management practices can reduce wash water runoff to storm drains and help lessen the impact car wash water discharges cause to the environment by transporting detergents and automotive pollutants.

Some of these management practices include:

- Using a commercial car wash.
- Washing your car on gravel, grass or other permeable surfaces.
- Blocking off storm drains during charity car wash events.
- Pumping or directing soapy water from car washes into a sanitary sewer drain. If pumping into a drain is not feasible, direct car wash water onto grass or landscaping that provides filtration.
- Using hoses with nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
- Using only biodegradable soaps.

Commercial vehicle and equipment washing in locations that allow the waste water to flow into the storm water drainage system is not allowed in Montgomery County. The use of good housekeeping practices can minimize the risk of contamination from wash

water discharges, and prevent legal liability for the business. The following are some general management practices that those businesses that have their own vehicle washing facilities can incorporate to control the water quality impacts of wash water discharges:

- Have all vehicle and equipment washing done in areas designed to collect and hold the wash and rinse water or effluent generated. Areas that are permeable (absorb the waste water) and prevent runoff into the storm sewer system are preferred. Recycle, collect or treat wash water effluent prior to discharge to the sanitary sewer system.

- No pressure cleaning, steam cleaning, or engine cleaning should be done where the waste water can drain into a storm drain, stream or creek.

- Be aware of the locations of on-site storm drain locations to avoid discharges to the storm drain system.

- Use biodegradable detergents and pressure washing solutions.

- Immediately contain and clean chemical and detergent spills.

References

Center for Watershed Protection (CWP). 1999. On Watershed Behavior. Watershed Protection Techniques. 3(2).

Lance Winslow III. 1999. How to Run a Successful Car Wash Fundraiser. Car Wash Guys International, Inc.

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). 1999. Stormwater Strategies: Community Responses to Runoff Pollution. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. New York, NY.

Pellegrin Research Group. 1998. Stormwater/urban runoff public education program. Interim evaluation, resident population, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. 28 pp.

For more information, please go to:

Montgomery County Storm Water Management and Control Regulation Program Website:
http://www.montgomerycountytn.org/county/stormwater/

Montgomery County Water Quality Buffer and Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Resolution
http://www.montgomerycountytn.org/county/stormwater/forms/stormwater/WQBuffer_IDDE.pdf

Prepared by the Montgomery County Storm Water Coordinator