Car Wash Facts

Water Pollution

Sources of water pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced in recent years. Now, more than 60% of water pollution comes from things like runoff from washing cars, fertilizer from farms and lawns, and litter. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. So, believe it or not, the biggest source of water pollution today is not industry – it is actually households like yours. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water. And it starts with realizing that our sewers and storm systems are separate – what goes into storm drains flows directly into the environment, untreated.

Facts and Figures

• A 1999 survey found that 44.5% of Americans prefer home washing as a method of vehicle care. Furthermore, at least 75% of all cars are washed at home one or more times a year. When combined with the data above, these figures reveal how serious a pollution concern home car washes actually are.

• The detergents found in car wash cleaners affect fish populations mainly through the power of the surfactants to destroy the external mucus layers protecting fish from bacteria and parasites, in addition to severe damage to the gills. Most fish die when detergent concentrations are near 15 parts per million (ppm); however, detergent concentrations as low as 5 ppm will kill fish eggs.

• The reality is that most commercial car washes use 60% less water in the entire washing process than a simple home wash uses just to rinse off a car. Special pressure nozzles mix in 50% air with the water to create pressure without volume.

What's the Problem With Washing my Car?

There is no problem with washing your car – the issue is just how and where you do it. When you wash your car in the driveway or on the street, the dirt, oil, and detergent laden water runs into storm drains and then directly into our steams, rivers, and lakes. Just as soap destroys dirt and organisms on your car, it will do the same in creeks and other bodies of water. Also, many of the commonly used soaps contain phosphates, which remove oxygen from the water. This depletion of oxygen has a detrimental effect on aquatic life. So, between the scum and oily grit from your car and the soap used to clean it, a simple act like washing your car in the driveway can directly harm our precious natural resources.

What Can **YOU** Do?

How can you wash your car and help keep our waters clean?

• Go to a full- or self-serve car wash rather than washing your cars, trucks, RVs, or boats at home. The water used there is cleaned and recycled.

• If you are going to wash your car at home, wash it on the lawn or gravel rather than on the driveway. The ground will Þlter the dirt and soap out of the water, and so protect our waterways.

• Use soaps without phosphates (which remove O2 from the water).

• Use soap sparingly and use a hose trigger nozzle to save H2O.

• When you're done, pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink, not in the street.