

# Why Is Washing My Car a Problem?

There's no problem with washing your car — just how and where you do it. When you wash your car in the driveway or on the street, the soap — together with the dirt, wax, oil, grease, grime, and grit — washes from your car, flows along the curb, and into nearby storm drains.

From there, the mess flows through the storm sewer system and directly into our rivers, streams, wetlands, and lakes. Since storm drains are not connected to wastewater treatment plants, pouring wastewater from car and power washing down storm drains impacts water quality for both human and aquatic life.

## Do Your Part



Use a car wash facility or wash your car on the lawn as local ordinance allows to help filter pollutants.



# POLLUTION ISN'T PRETTY.



## Car & Power Washing



For more information or to learn more about protecting our water, visit the link below or contact the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission.



[mywatersheds.org](http://mywatersheds.org)  
[mywatersheds@mitcrpc.org](mailto:mywatersheds@mitcrpc.org)



**TRI-COUNTY**  
regional planning commission



[mywatersheds.org](http://mywatersheds.org)

# Harmful Effects of Power Washing

Power washing your car, deck, driveway, or siding can impact our watershed. Here are some of the effects from the chemicals washed off during power washing and the soaps and cleaning agents utilized:

- Phosphates in soap can cause excessive algae growth and reduce oxygen levels in our waterways. Biodegradable products also can lower dissolved oxygen levels.
- Soap surfactants damage fish gills and kill their eggs.
- Heavy metals impact the growth rates and reproduction of aquatic organisms.
- Oils can stop oxygen from reaching plants and animals.



# What's The Best Way to Wash My Car?

Simply put, the most environmentally friendly way to wash your car is by using a commercial car wash. When you wash your car on the road or in the driveway, all the soaps, greases, grime, and heavy metals from your vehicle wash off the car and flow down the street. These harmful chemicals then wash down storm drains, which flow directly into our lakes, rivers, and streams.

## Help Keep Our Water Clean

- Avoid washing your car in the driveway, alley, or street.
- Wash your car on the lawn as permitted by local ordinance so the ground can filter wastewater naturally.
- Pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink when you're done, not into the street. Don't let soapy water from car or power washing flow down storm drains.
- Avoid using engine cleaners or degreasers.
- Use a hose nozzle with a trigger to save water when you don't need it.
- Use *Safer Choice* certified cleaning products for car and power washing.
- Try using plain water first for power washing, you may find a cleaner is not needed.



## The Benefits of Using a Car Wash

- The average homeowner uses 116 gallons of water to wash a car! Most commercial car washes use 60% less water for the entire process than a homeowner uses to rinse their vehicle.
- Car washes filter and reuse wash water several times before sending it to the sanitary sewer to properly dispose of and treat wastewater.