

R-1 Residential Automobile and Boat Washing

This applies to washing automobiles or boats at your house.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are required by King County Code 9.12. If the BMPs included here are not enough to prevent contamination of stormwater, you will be required to take additional measures.

Automobile washing is one of the most common residential activities that pollute surface waters, streams, creeks, lakes, and Puget Sound. The soaps and detergents used to wash automobiles can be more of a pollution threat than the grime washed off the automobiles. Even soaps that are labeled “biodegradable,” “environmentally friendly” or “nontoxic” are harmful to aquatic life and water quality. The “nontoxic” label simply means the soap is less toxic to humans.

The most environmentally responsible thing to do is to take your vehicle to a commercial car wash where wash water is recycled and discharged to the sanitary sewer.

Required BMPs:

- When washing vehicles or boats, use a mild detergent or soap that is pH neutral. Washing may only be done in an area that allows for infiltration of the wash water, such as gravel, grass, or loose soil.
- Never clean or pressure wash the engine or undercarriage of your automobile at home. The pollutants from this activity can contaminate your property or well water.
- Flush any remaining soapy water in your wash bucket down the toilet or pour it down the sink.
- If you wash on a paved area such as your driveway and use soaps or detergents, you must do ONE of the following:
- Redirect the wash water to vegetated areas such as the lawn using temporary measures such as a berm, boom/socks, or other solid materials like a piece of lumber placed at the low point of where your vehicle is parked. This will redirect the flow of water.

OR

- Use a wet vacuum to collect the wash water and then dispose of the water in your sink or toilet for treatment at your local sewage treatment plant.

Tips:

- Use a hose nozzle with a trigger and shut it off when you’re not using it to conserve water.
- There are several waterless car wash products on the market. Cloths, rags, etc. used with these products should be disposed of as solid waste.
- Do not take your car to a “charity car wash” unless you can see that the wash water is being collected and discharged to the sewer system. When in doubt, ask.

For more information or assistance contact the King County Stormwater Services at 206-477-4811 and visit kingcounty.gov/stormwater.