
R-1: Residential Automobile and Boat Washing

The following best management practices (BMPs) apply to washing vehicles and boats at your house. Vehicle washing is one of the most common residential activities that pollute streams, creeks, lakes, and Puget Sound. 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 properly recycled and discharged to the sanitary sewer.

Potential pollutants can include but are not limited to hydrocarbons, metals, nutrients, oil and grease, oxygen demanding substances, PCBs, pH, sediment, and other pollutants.

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

Required BMPs

- Washing may only be done in an area that allows for infiltration of the wash water, such as gravel, grass, or loose soil.
- When washing vehicles or boats, use a mild detergent or soap that is pH neutral.
- Never clean or pressure wash the engine or undercarriage of your vehicle at home. The pollutants from this activity can contaminate your property or well water.
- Dispose of any remaining soapy water in your wash bucket down the toilet or sink.
- Do not wash or rinse vehicles on permeable pavement or pavers.
- If you wash on an impermeable (conventional) 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 to the vegetated area where it can infiltrate into the ground; or.
 - Use a wet vacuum or pump 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 the event organizers where the car wash water is being disposed of.

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