



The City of San Diego

Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program

Car Washing

When it rains or when water flows out of yards or over pavement, it flows directly into storm drains. Many people mistakenly believe this water gets "cleaned" before reaching waterways. The sewer system and the storm water conveyance systems (drains, inlets, and catch basins) are separate; they are not connected. Sewer water gets treated, but everything that washes into the storm water conveyance system goes untreated directly into our rivers, creeks, bays and ocean. This causes beach closures and postings due to contamination. Releasing pollutants into the storm water collection system is a violation of the City Municipal Code, (43.0301). Whether you are at home, work, or play, there are ways that residents and businesses alike can "Think Blue" and prevent pollutants from reaching our waterways.

Most of us don't think of our car as a source of beach pollution-- but it is. The reality is vehicles are a necessity today, and we don't have a lot of choice about that. However, we can be more environmentally responsible and choose the method(s) of caring for and washing our vehicles in an ocean friendly way. Car washing is a pollution problem because many metals and automotive fluids are washed off with the soapy water, travel down the gutter collecting more street pollutants, then enter our storm water conveyance system and spill into our waterways and bays.

Residential/Non-Commercial Vehicles: The Municipal Code allows for the washing of residential vehicles for non-commercial purposes. While washing of your vehicle is allowed, washing-off pollutants from your vehicle such as paint, oils, sediment, debris and such like pollutant(s) is illegal. This is why we encourage that you wash your personal vehicle without creating runoff. When washing is done at home, pollution can be minimized by washing the vehicle on the lawn or over a landscaped area to absorb the liquid and limit runoff from your property. Or, limit runoff by using a bucket and rag to wash your car and a control nozzle on your hose to rinse the car. By actively reducing the amount of water used you are not only protecting our ocean, but helping to conserve water and reducing your water bill.

Charity Washes: may be conducted as long as they are staged in a manner which avoids or minimizes the discharge of pollutants- soap, sediment, water that may be contaminated from automotive fluids and residues. Start by locating all storm drain inlets on, near or downstream of the wash site and sweeping up all sediment and debris in the area prior to washing the vehicles. On the day of the event, place sandbags or other blocking devices in front of the inlets to prevent wash water from entering the storm drain conveyance system. Any remaining standing wash water is to be swept or wet-vacuumed into a landscaped area or into the sanitary sewer system. We recommend the site and inlets be swept at the end of the wash event.

Illegal Washing Activities: Car dealerships, auto detailers, rental agencies and other automotive related businesses that wash vehicles for commercial purposes must prevent the dirty water from entering the storm water conveyance system. All washing activity for commercial purposes must control, contain and capture the wash water before it leaves the site and/or enters a storm drain or a conveyance system. Failure to do so is illegal.

Washing of all vehicles (residential and commercial) that carry items or substances that have a potential to discharge the following pollutants: paint, oils, sediment, yard waste, construction debris, chemicals, hazardous wastes and other pollutants-is illegal.

Adopt these behaviors and help Clean up our beaches and bays.

Think Blue, San Diego. For more information, call (619) 235-1000, or log on to: www.thinkbluesd.org

Think
&
Act
Blue

