



Bay-friendly Car Washing: Go Commercial



Step Away From Your Suds Bucket

Before you step out with your soap and chamois, you may want to check your bucket at the door. A well-intentioned afternoon of auto detailing releases soapy water, dirt, grime, motor oil, brake pad residue, and road salt, to name a few things, directly to storm drains. The substances you wash off of your car and into the storm drain are *not* treated before they end up in the watershed. Instead, they go on to pollute the water and impair its quality for us and wildlife.

A Watershed Beneath Your Feet

The purpose of a storm drain is to move water off of roads quickly to prevent flooding. Unfortunately, storm drains are indiscriminate when it comes to what they carry off to the watershed. As a result, the watershed becomes laden with pollutants that adversely impact its health. Soaps containing phosphates are known to contribute to algal growth, which can ultimately lead to lower oxygen levels as the algae decay. Low oxygen levels are detrimental to aquatic and plant life. Surfactants found in degreasing soaps (including biodegradable soaps) account for the most harm done to surface waters. According to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), surfactants can damage the external mucus layers in fish that otherwise protect them against bacteria and parasites. Surfactants also lower the surface tension of water; consequently, harmful substances are able to penetrate the water more readily.

**ALL STORMDRAINS LEAD DIRECTLY
TO OUR PONDS, RIVERS & BAYS**



From Driveway to Drive-in

The most important difference between washing your car at home and at a commercial carwash is where the water goes after it runs off of your car. Commercial carwashes are required to collect their water and send it to the sanitary sewers, where it is treated before it is released to the watershed. Commercial carwashes are also more efficient when it comes to water usage. Washing your car at home uses an average of 140 gallons



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of water, while commercial carwashes use an average of 60 gallons of water per wash.



Making an Impact

While it may seem like a single carwash in the driveway does not amount to much, imagine thousands of people having the same idea. If the average person were to wash one car per month, that would amount to releasing roughly 1,700 gallons of soapy water into the watershed each year. The impact to the environment would be tremendous, if you were to multiply this amount by the number of people in your town, county, or state. Once the soapy water leaves your line of sight, it is a straight shot to

your watershed. Improving the health of our local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay requires thoughtful action on the part of all of us. In this case, that action would only cost you a handful of quarters.

For additional information, please see the following resources.

“Vehicle Washwater: Keeping it out of Our Waters” (MDE)

http://www.mde.maryland.gov/assets/document/vehicle_washwater_brochure.pdf

“Managing Urban Runoff” (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

<http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/NPS/facts/point7.htm>

“Stormwater Runoff” (Chesapeake Bay Foundation) <http://www.cbf.org/Page.aspx?pid=491>

“GSFC Stormwater Management FAQ” (GSFC)

http://code250.gsfc.nasa.gov/environmental/water_storm.html#FAQ



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