What's the Problem with Car Washing in the Driveway?

**The Dirty Facts about Car Washing**

For many, car washing is a spring and summertime routine. Often, people do not know that by washing off all of the dirt that accumulates on their cars, that they might actually be causing harm to our local waterways.

Water entering storm drains, unlike water that enters sewers, does not undergo treatment before it is discharged into our waterways. So, when cars are washed on streets and driveways, that dirty water eventually ends up in rivers, streams, creeks, and lakes.

Washing the grit, grease, and grime off of just one car may not seem like a problem, but there are millions of cars in all of the towns and cities around Puget Sound, so it really adds up.

**The Problem**

Washing your car is only a problem if you do not know where or how to do it correctly. The average homeowner uses 116 gallons of water to wash one car. Most commercial carwashes use 60 percent less water for the entire process than a homeowner uses just to rinse one car.

Outdoor car washing can result in high loads of nutrients, dirt, metals, and hydrocarbons entering our waterways as the soapy water used to wash the dirt off of cars flows down the driveway, onto the street, along the curb, and into the storm drain. This pollution can harm water quality, fish, and wildlife.

Small concentrations of detergents in streams can kill fish and their eggs, as well as inhibit their ability to reproduce. Detergents can also destroy the natural protections fish have against bacteria and parasites and can severely damage a fish’s gills.

The phosphates from soap can also cause excess algae to grow in our waterways. Excessive algae growth makes water cloudy, green, unattractive, smelly, and unhealthy for swimming, boating, fishing, or drinking.

**The Best Alternative**

The best way to minimize the environmental effects of washing your car at home is to use a commercial car wash facility.

**Quick Facts for washing your car the right way...**

1. Use soap sparingly.

2. Use a hose nozzle with a trigger to save water.

3. Pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink when you’re done, not in the street.

4. Or wash your car on a grassy area so the ground can filter the water naturally.

5. But remember the best way is to take your car to a commercial car wash

Changing the way you wash your car is something that you can do to make a difference in the quality of our water sources. The individual family can easily and economically manage this source of stormwater pollution.

SOURCE: <http://www.arlingtontx.gov/stormwater> (pdf) The Dirty Facts About Car Washing