

Water Pollution – Wash Your Car the Right Way

With spring upon us, it is a popular time to begin washing your car or hosting community car washes. What you may not realize is that while you are washing off dirt from the winter, you are also disposing of that dirt, along with any soap chemicals, into the ground and unfortunately the watershed nearby.

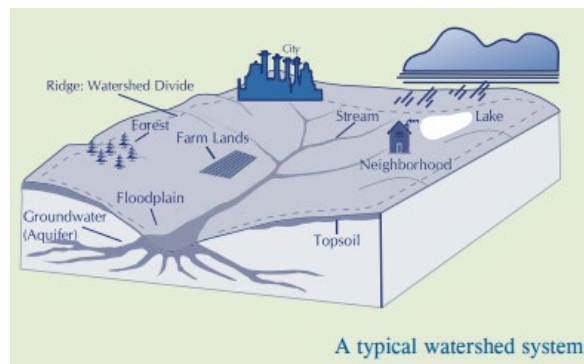
A watershed is an area of land whose water drains into a common point, for example a stream, river, or lake nearby¹. It is important to understand that every small watershed drains into a larger one, and eventually, that water flows into the ocean.

When washing your car, or multiple, wash on a surface that will absorb the water, rather than create runoff. These surfaces include gravel or grass, which will both absorb and filter the water prior to it entering the watershed². Avoid hard surfaces such as concrete or pavement, as these will create runoff that will likely enter catch basins or storm drains, from where the polluted water will enter the watershed. This untreated car wash water can harm plants, wildlife, aquatic life, and water quality as a whole.

What Can You Do?

You can reduce water pollution by following these important steps:

- Use biodegradable, phosphate-free, water-based soaps and cleaners only³.
- For group or fundraising washes, partner with a commercial car wash to reduce likelihood of pollution and runoff. These commercial lots utilize sewer drainage, rather than catch basins or storm drains.
- Limit water use and avoid high-pressurized systems to save water.
- Wash the exterior of the car only⁴.



For More Information:

- EPA's Community PSA Handout: <https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/psatautowash.pdf>
- EPA's Wash Your Car the Right Way brochure: https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/KSMO_CarWashing.pdf

¹ Mid-America Regional Council. "Watershed Tip". Retrieved Apr 24, 2020. https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/KSMO_CarWashing.pdf

² New Hampshire Government. 2018. "Environmental Fact Sheet". Retrieved Apr 21, 2020. <https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/wmb/documents/wmb-14.pdf>

³ Mid-America Regional Council. "Watershed Tip". Retrieved Apr 24, 2020. https://cfpub.epa.gov/npstbx/files/KSMO_CarWashing.pdf

⁴ New Hampshire Government. 2018. "Environmental Fact Sheet". Retrieved Apr 21, 2020. <https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/factsheets/wmb/documents/wmb-14.pdf>