



# Water Quality Best Management Practices for Community Car Wash Events

City of Folsom Public Works Department  
Stormwater Quality Program

50 Natoma Street, Folsom CA 95630 (916) 355-7272

Community car wash events are a popular means of raising money for worthwhile causes. However, if runoff from car washes is not properly managed, it can negatively impact our local creeks and rivers. This document explains the water quality concerns and outlines steps that should be taken to protect our environment when conducting a car wash fundraiser event in our community.

***When conducting your fundraiser event, please follow the steps outlined below to comply with local laws and protect our community's natural creek resources.***

## How does runoff from car wash fundraiser events harm the environment?

Wash water from car washing activities typically contains dirt (sediment), soap (detergent/surfactants), gasoline and motor oil, as well as metals and oil/grease residues from exhaust fumes and brake pads. When this dirty water is allowed to flow into storm drains, it travels directly to our local creeks and rivers without treatment. This pollution can kill or harm fish and other aquatic life and make our waterways unsafe for drinking, swimming and fishing. Alone, one car wash fundraiser event may not create a significant adverse environmental impact. But, collectively, car wash fundraiser events can contribute large amounts of polluted wash water to our local waterways.

Did you know that commercial car washes in the City of Folsom are not allowed to discharge wash water to the storm drain system? They must either recycle the water or discharge it to the sanitary sewer system, which in turn will deliver the polluted water to a wastewater treatment plant to be cleaned before it enters the Sacramento River. Currently, only relatively small volumes of wash water from residential car washing is allowed into the storm drain system, and the City is working hard to educate residents about proper ways to reduce pollution if they choose to wash their car at home.

## Planning your car wash fundraiser event - select a suitable location:

- Consider the following options for selecting the site for your car wash event, in the order shown:
  - **Option #1.** Select an area to wash the cars where the wash water will not enter storm drain inlets or nearby waterways. Look for an area where wash water will naturally drain to landscaping or gravel, allowing the water to soak into the ground without creating runoff.
  - **Option #2.** On hot days, block off the storm drain inlet(s) with a rubber mat(s) and allow the water to pool and evaporate throughout the day. If standing water at the inlet is a problem (e.g., safety concerns), or the water has not evaporated at the end of the day, you may need to use a sump pump/hose or wet/dry shop vacuum to move the water to a vegetated or depressed area for filtering and evaporation, or to a sanitary sewer for disposal (see Option #3).
  - **Option #3.** Locate the nearest on-site sanitary sewer manhole or cleanout. Contact the City to confirm whether the sanitary sewer(s) can be used for disposal of your wash water. A City employee will arrange to meet you at the site to inspect the site and discuss the situation. Note that sanitary sewer manholes in the public right-of-way (e.g., streets) cannot be used due to safety concerns. On the day of the car wash, you will be required to block any storm drain inlets in the vicinity of the car wash with storm drain mats (available on loan from the City) and use a sump pump and hose, portable tank, or other setup to deliver the accumulated wash water to the sanitary sewer. Pumps and generators (if needed) are available at a local equipment rental/supply company (check for discount programs for non-profit organizations). Alternatively, check with the parents involved in your event; someone may be able to loan you the equipment you need.
- If none of the above options work, the site you are considering is not acceptable for a car wash fundraiser event.
- Consider partnering with a local car wash business for your event. This scenario has worked in other U.S. cities, whereby the car wash owner has agreed to provide space for the fundraiser event at their facility (runoff must go to a sanitary sewer) or the owner has allowed the non-profit group to sell tickets for the car wash facility, with a portion of the proceeds going back to the group.

## Before the car wash fundraiser event:

- If you selected a site where you will discharge wash water to the sanitary sewer, contact the City to arrange for an on-site meeting to explain the requirements for blocking the storm drain inlet(s) and pumping water. The City can loan you rubber mat(s) for blocking the storm drain inlet(s).
- Sign the last page of these requirements and provide one copy to the property owner of the car wash site and another copy to the City Public Works Department at City Hall.
- Purchase soaps, cleaners or detergents labeled “non-toxic,” “phosphate free,” and/or “biodegradable.” However, realize that using these products alone is not enough; even biodegradable products can harm aquatic life over the long term. The safest products for the environment are vegetable-based or citrus-based soaps.
- Do not use acid-based wheel cleaners or engine degreasers.

## The day of the car wash fundraiser event:

- Ensure that one or more adults are responsible for making sure that all participants follow these requirements.
- Hold a meeting with all participants to explain the potential negative environmental impacts of polluted wash water and the proper procedures that should be followed when conducting car wash activities to reduce pollution. Let the participants read these requirements if necessary.
- Set up your system for keeping wash water out of the City’s storm drain system (see options above), including blocking all drain inlets with rubber mats or similar.
- Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area.
- Shake car mats into a trash can or vacuum them. Do not shake dirt from car mats directly onto the ground.
- Conserve water and reduce runoff by using a spray nozzle with an automatic shut off and shutting off the hose when not in use. Do not allow water to run continuously.
- Use half the manufacturer’s recommended dosage for soap (e.g., ½ capful instead of 1 capful).
- Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash process, rather than adding more soap directly to rags or sponges. Wring sponges and rags into buckets, not onto the ground.
- Always empty buckets of dirty wash water onto landscaped areas where the water cannot reach a storm drain, or into the sanitary sewer system via sinks, toilets or an approved sanitary sewer manhole.

## After the car wash fundraiser event:

- If you used Option 2 or 3, properly dispose of any remaining ponded wash water as discussed above.
- Clean up the site. Have a volunteer walk the perimeter of the site to pick up trash and debris and dispose of it in trashcans or dumpsters.
- Remove rubber mat(s) from the storm drain inlet(s) and return to the City.

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## Acknowledgement:

The following signature acknowledges receipt and understanding of this document and intent to comply with the requirements as stated.

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Name *(please print)*

Phone Number(s)

Car Wash Event Date/Location

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Signature/Date

Sponsoring Organization

Property Owner Name

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City Staff Acknowledgment of Receipt