CAR WASHING POLLUTION PREVENTION

Protecting fish and other aquatic life from harmful pollutants

Oil, grease, salt, soap, and sediment are just a few of the pollutants that you wash off from your car.

These pollutants typically drain into the storm sewer system and are untreated when entering our waterways. Fish and other aquatic life are harmed by the harsh chemicals from detergents. The phosphates from soap can cause excess algae to grow which makes water cloudy, green, smelly, and unhealthy for recreational use and aquatic life. As the algae decays, large amounts of oxygen are consumed, leaving very little oxygen available for fish. Detergents also contain a surfactant in order for the cleaner to rinse off easily with water. Surfactants harm fish by destroying layers that protect them from bacteria and parasites, resulting in severe damage to a fish's gills. Fish eggs are also killed even in low concentrations of surfactants. Lastly, detergents in the waterways allow for pesticides and phenols to be more easily absorbed by fish. So how can you help protect fish and other aquatic life? Here are some tips for minimizing or eliminating pollution caused by washing your car:

Commercial Car Wash

- Self-serve or machine car washes are great alternatives as the water drains to the sanitary sewers where it will be treated.
- Depending on the equipment, commercial car washes can use substantially less water (up to 60% compared to washing at home).
- Some car washes also recycle and reuse the water before draining to the sanitary sewers.

Residential Car Washing

- Washing on a gravel or grassy area will allow for the water to infiltrate into the ground instead of draining into the storm sewer system.
- If those areas are not an option, before washing your car in the driveway, sweep and dispose of any trash or debris that would be carried to the storm drain.
- Try washing without soaps, using a pressure washer typically removes all the dirt and grime from a car
- Phosphate-free and biodegradable soaps are safer alternatives to the typical detergents used in car washing. Products from Simple Green, Eco Touch, and Chemical Guys are examples of environmentally friendly soaps.

Charity Car Washes

- Try a "fish friendly" car wash by using phosphate-free and biodegradable soaps.
- Control water by using a spray nozzle.
- Determine if water can be diverted to a grassy area instead of draining directly to an inlet. Using rolled up towels is an easy way to divert water.
- Check with your local municipality on options for protecting nearby inlets.
- Discuss with owners at self-serve car washes about donating their space(s) to use for the fundraising event.