



April 30, 2009

Keep that car clean while remaining green

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We've recently heard and seen a great deal of information on ways we all can be better environmental stewards. However, there is one simple change car owners can make that would greatly improve our area's waterways: Stop washing your car in the driveway and use a professional car wash.

Few people realize that washing a vehicle in the driveway is an environmentally unfriendly chore. Unlike household water that enters sewers or septic systems and undergoes treatment before it is discharged into the environment, the water from a driveway car wash goes directly into storm drains and into rivers, streams and creeks. In addition, homeowners use on average 140 gallons of water per wash versus the 55 to 60 gallons of water at professional washes.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, detergent-rich water used to wash cars at home flows down the street and into the storm drain. This water may contain high amounts of nutrients, metals and hydrocarbons.

Professional car washes are required to treat their wash water discharge before release into the sanitary sewer system.

The EPA believes that many people do not associate the effects of washing their vehicles with local water quality and may be unaware that the discharges that enter storm drains are not treated at plants before being discharged into local waters. Surveys indicate that the average citizen does not fully understand the connection between his yard, the street, the storm sewer and the streams.

Besides using professional car washes, the EPA also offers the following suggestions to protect waterways:

- » Block off the storm drain during charity carwashes or use an insert to catch wash water.
- » Pump soapy water from car washes into a sanitary sewer drain.
- » Use hoses with nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
- » On-site storm drains should be mapped to avoid discharges to the storm drain system.
- » Spills should be immediately contained and treated.

Taking steps to change how you clean your car is a simple but effective step to help improve the quality of our waterways.

For more information contact www.co.hamilton.in.us/cleanwater
