

Proper Car Washing Guidelines

Stormwater Fact Sheet – Protecting Our Water Quality

Everyone likes a nice, shiny clean car. Here in southern Arizona, there is little rainfall so your car will stay cleaner longer than areas with higher rainfall amounts. However, we are prone to dust storms which may require frequent car washing. If conducted improperly, runoff from car washing activities can contain pollutants such as nutrients from detergents, oil and grease, heavy metals (brake dust), and sediment. The City of Mesa (City) has developed these guidelines addressing residential car washing activities in order to prevent and/or reduce the discharge of pollutants to the City's storm sewer system.

REMEMBER, ONLY RAIN IN THE STORM DRAIN

The purpose of the storm drain system is to protect against flooding and water damage by quickly removing rain water from our streets. The storm sewer system is completely separate from the sanitary sewer system, which is designed to capture and treat wastewater from sinks, toilets and other sources. Unlike the sanitary sewer system, discharges from the storm sewer system gets **no treatment** and may ultimately drain into washes, lakes, retention basins, community parks, and can even make its way into the Salt and Gila rivers. This is why the City has ordinances and programs to reduce pollutants into our storm drains.

Although water from residential car washing is allowed to be discharged to the City's storm sewer system, associated pollutants such as harsh detergents, oil and grease, heavy metals (brake dust), and sediment are prohibited. This is why it is important to remember - **only rain in the storm drain**.

CAR WASH FACILITIES

It is best to wash your vehicle at a car wash facility. This is the best option to keep pollutants from entering the City's storm sewer system. Commercial car wash facilities often recycle their water or are required to treat their wash water prior to discharging to the City's sanitary sewer system. In addition, car wash facilities use less water than washing your car at home.



There are various types of car wash facilities and one should meet your needs. These include:

- Hand car wash facilities, where the vehicle is washed by employees.
- Self-service facilities, which are generally coin-operated, where the customer does the washing, including "jet washing".
- In-bay automatics, which consist of an automatic machine that rolls back and forth over a stationary vehicle - often seen at filling stations and stand-alone wash sites.
- Tunnel washes, which use a conveyor to move the vehicle through a series of fixed cleaning mechanisms.

CHARITY CAR WASHES

Though not specifically allowed in the City's stormwater ordinance, discharges from charity car washes are allowed as long as they operate in compliance with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality's (ADEQ) De Minimis General Permit. This permit allows discharges to surface waters that are categorized as "ephemeral" or "effluent-dependent."



All surface waters identified in the City's Storm Water Management Plan that receive discharges from the City's storm sewer system are either ephemeral or effluent-dependent. The ADEQ permit requires that only the exterior of the vehicles be washed (i.e. no engines) and that biodegradable soaps and/or water only be used. A copy of the ADEQ De Minimis General Permit can be found at: <http://www.azdeq.gov/environ/water/permits/gen.html#demi>

TIPS FOR WASHING YOUR CAR AT HOME

Some people really love to wash their own cars at the home, which is why this type of discharge is allowed to the City's storm sewer system. Below are some tips on how you can wash your car at home and reduce the discharge of associated pollutants, therefore operating in compliance with City ordinances.

- Wash your car on gravel, grass or other permeable surfaces
- Use non-phosphate detergents and use detergents sparingly
- Better still just use plain water, a coarse sponge and a little elbow grease
- Use a hose attachment that provides high pressure and low volume
- Use a hose attachment that automatically turns off when left unattended
- Empty wash water from your bucket into a sink or toilet



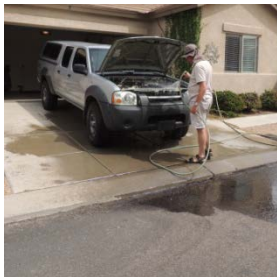
HEAVILY SOILED VEHICLES

In Arizona we have access to all sorts of great places to take our cars and trucks where access is limited to unpaved roadways. After taking these types of trips, our vehicles can be covered with excessive amounts of debris, dirt, and mud. Washing these vehicles on your driveway at home would result in a discharge of sediment that would impact the City's storm sewer system and would be a violation of the City's stormwater ordinance. A possible solution is to wash these vehicles on permeable surfaces, but make sure it does not discharge to the street.



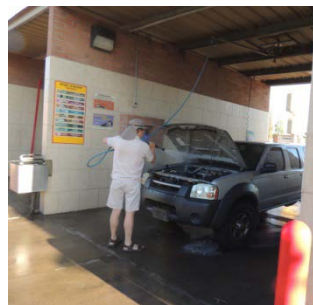
WASHING ENGINES OR THE UNDERCARRIAGE

Cleaning engines and the undercarriage produces a lot of grime, oil, and grease, and other auto fluids. When these areas of your car require cleaning, you must use a detail shop or carwash that provide these services or a self-serve carwash that allows for this type of cleaning. Discharges of grime, oil, and grease, and other auto fluids is a violation of the City's stormwater ordinance.



Do not wash engines or the undercarriage at home.

Take your car to a detail shop.



Use a self-service carwash that allows for engine washing.



For more information call the City of Mesa Environmental Hotline at 480-644-3599.