

## You can help protect Northeast Wisconsin waters

Car wash fundraisers, although a popular way to raise money for great causes, can hurt the environment if runoff (dirty water) is not properly managed. Properties and parking lots used for fundraiser are mostly designed to handle rain (clean water), not water with soap and chemicals. Soapy suds from car washes hurt local waters and the animals who live there.



## How does runoff from car wash fundraisers harm our waterways?

When washing cars in a paved area, the wash water, which contains soap and detergent, residues from exhaust fumes, brake pads, gasoline and motor oil, washes off the cars, flows off the pavement and into nearby storm drains (usually openings in the curb or gutter). Unlike the sewers that serve our homes and businesses (called sanitary sewers), which carry wastewater to treatment plants, storm drains carry any water entering them directly and quickly to the nearest stream with no pollutant removal. Soap, detergents (even biodegradable ones) can be poisonous to fish, and other wildlife. A single fundraising event can pour thousands of gallons of soapy, oily and gritty water into local streams.

## Contacts for more information

To report an illegal discharge of pollutants into a storm drain contact:

Your local community's  
storm water department

If you would like more information about what you can do to impact water quality in Northeast Wisconsin visit:

[RenewOurWaters.org](http://RenewOurWaters.org)

Northeast Wisconsin Stormwater Consortium  
P.O. Box 1861  
Appleton, Wisconsin 54912  
Phone: 920-858-4246

## Car Wash Fundraisers

Your group's guide to  
planning a water-Friendly  
Car Wash Fundraiser



**Renew  
Our Waters**  
Every choice counts.

## Water-Friendly Tip

Consider holding your car washing fundraiser at a commercial car wash. Wash water from commercial car washes goes to sewage treatment plants rather than down a storm drain.



An alternative option to actually holding a car wash is selling commercial car wash tokens. This is a great option as you could hold your fundraiser throughout the year!



Call your local car wash to ask if they offer fundraising options for schools, teams and charities.

Remember to stop and think before you allow anything to go directly into the gutter or storm drain.

## Planning a Low Impact Car Wash Fundraiser

If you choose not to partner with a commercial car wash, try to incorporate these practices to reduce the overall environmental impact of your fundraiser:

### Selecting the Site

Selecting the site for your car wash is very important. When talking to property owners of shopping centers, schools or churches where you are considering holding the event, ask them where the water flows from the storm drains on the property.

- The best locations will have some stormwater management controls in place. These controls include grass swales, sand filters, oil and grit separators, and stormwater management ponds that treat stormwater before it is discharged to a stream.
- If there are no storm water management controls in place, choose a site where the wash water can soak into grass, gravel or be diverted to nearby landscaping. This will allow the wash water to filter through the vegetation and/or soil instead of flowing directly into a storm drain. Absorbent pads, which can be purchased at automotive shops, can also be placed in the curb or grass swale to catch oils and other chemicals.



### Doing it Right

- Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area.
- Do not use acid-based wheel cleaners or engine degreasers.
- A soap-free wash is best for the environment. If you do use soaps, use cleaners or detergents labeled “non-toxic,” “chlorine-free”, “phosphate-free,” or “biodegradable.” The safest products for the environment are vegetable or citrus-based products. Using biodegradable soap does not lessen its immediate environmental impact—it simply means that the soap will degrade in time. A flush of “biodegradable” soap suds will still harm fish or invertebrates in your local stream.



### Train the Volunteers

Hold a meeting with car wash volunteers to explain the following methods for reducing environmental impact:

- Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash rather than adding soap directly to rags or sponges.
- Wring sponges and washrags into buckets, not the ground.
- Conserve water by using a spray nozzle with an automatic shut-off.
- Always empty buckets into the sanitary sewer system (sinks or toilets), NOT down the storm drain.
- Remember to clean up after the car wash fundraiser.