# Pollution Prevention Facts Involving Car Washing

Dear Village of Lexington Residents,

Through our storm water program the Village of Lexington will periodically post information regarding things that we can do as a community to help keep the environment around our lakes and streams from having a negative impact. This article contains information to help guide you on things that you can do to help maintain a clean environment when washing our vehicles in our yards.

This management measure involves educating the general public on the water quality impacts of the outdoor washing of automobiles and how to avoid allowing polluted runoff from entering the storm drain systems. Outdoor car washing has the potential to result in high loads of nutrients, metals and hydrocarbons during dry weather conditions in many watersheds, as the detergent-rich water used to wash the grime off of our cars flows down the street and into storm drains. Commercial car washes often recycle their water or are required to treat their wash water discharge prior to release to the sanitary sewer system, meaning that most storm water impacts from car washing are from residents, businesses and charity car wash fundraisers that discharge polluted wash waters into storm drains. Surveys of households who wash their own cars in their yard found that 60% of these residents could be classified as "chronic car washers" i.e., they wash their car at least once a month. Between 70 and 90 % of these residents reported that their car wash water drained directly to the street, and presumably, into the nearest stream or lake. It has been estimated that 25% of the population of the United States may be classified as chronic car washers, which translates into about 27 million potential residential car wash polluters.

Car washing is a common for residents and a popular way for organizations such as scout troops, schools, and sports teams to raise funds. This activity is not limited by geographic region, but its impact on water quality will be the greatest in more urban areas with higher concentrations of automobiles. Preventative practices that these groups and residents alike can use to minimize the impacts of wash water run off are:

- Use a commercial car wash
- Wash your car on gravel, grass, or other permeable surfaces
- Block off the storm drain or filter the waters received by the drain
- Pump wash water to grassy areas or landscaping to provide filtration and irrigation
- Use only biodegradable soaps

The greatest obstacle that we face in helping to control pollution may be lack of knowledge regarding polluted runoff. Many people do not associate the effects of their vehicle washing activities with local water quality. They do not understand the chemical content of the soaps and detergents that they use, and do not realize that the discharges that enter storm drains do not receive any type of treatment before they enter our lakes and streams. Surveys indicate that the average citizen does not fully understand the

hydraulic connection between their yard, the street, the storm sewer system, and the lakes and streams.
Most car washing best management practices are inexpensive, and rely more on good housekeeping practices (where vehicles are washed, or planning for the collection or filtering of the water) than on expensive technology. So when it comes to washing your favorite mode of transportation remember that as with all pollution prevention measures, knowledge on the reduction of pollutant loads from outdoor car washing activities are bound to have a positive effect on the environment.

Please Remember…. Your contribution of soaps and chemicals may seem small. However, when combined with your neighbors' activities, the effect is greatly magnified and often results in damaged or unhealthy aquatic ecosystems.

Sincerely,
Christopher M. Heiden
MS4 Project Manager

## For more information on topics like this please visit:

www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3682_3714-118486--,00.html
www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater
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Michigan State University Extension Office 1-810-648-2515
Sanilac County Conservation District Office 1-810-648-2116
Or call the Village of Lexington offices at:
1-810-359-8631 or 1-810-359-5901