



Professional car washes are an easy way for consumers to remove dirt and grime from their vehicles. The dirt washed off vehicles as well as the cleaning materials themselves may be harmful to the environment. As the operator of a professional car wash, what must you do to keep this dirt and the chemicals used in the cleaning process from being released into the environment?

- Make sure wastewater is connected to the City sewer, and not discharging to the storm water system.
- Maintain the solids interceptor and have it pumped out on a regular basis.
- Sludge that accumulates in the grates, can be dried out and disposed of in the solid waste. Take care that the dried sludge does not become a nuisance to the solid waste collection.



Contaminants in wash wastewater include the following:

- Oil and grease, which contain hazardous materials such as benzene, lead, zinc, chromium, arsenic, pesticides, herbicides, nitrates, and other metals
- Detergents, including biodegradable detergents, which can be poisonous to fish
- Phosphates, which are plant nutrients and can cause excessive growth of nuisance plants in water bodies

- Chemicals, such as hydrofluoric acid and ammonium bifluoride products (ABF), and solvent-based solutions that are harmful to living organisms
- Chemicals and oils used for the maintenance of cleaning machinery (for automatic systems)
- Debris that can clog storm sewer inlets and grates and thereby prevent storm water drainage to the sewer

How can I make my car wash more environmentally friendly?

As mentioned above, the toxic materials associated with a professional car wash system include detergents, phosphates, chemicals such as hydrofluoric acid, and ABFs. The amount of toxic materials in a professional car wash system can be reduced by taking the measures below.

- Use biodegradable soaps and chemicals instead of solvent-based solutions.
- Reduce the amount of detergent used in the system. Using less detergent produces fewer suds and reduces the amount of discharge to the sewer system.
- Water softeners and filtration can lower the amount of total suspended solids in water and reduce spotting on vehicles. If there is less spotting on the vehicles, less detergent will be needed.