Wenatchee Valley Stormwater Program

Chelan County • Wenatchee • Douglas County • East Wenatchee

Illicit Discharge Detection & Elimination

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

Frequently Asked Questions About Vehicle Washing

Q: Is Ecology saying I can't wash my car at home?

A: No. Ecology's stormwater permits require cities and counties to adopt ordinances that prohibit putting anything down the storm drains with pollutants like soapy water, dirt, oil and metals. Because of this, businesses will be required to wash their vehicles or fleets in a manner that does not allow wash water to enter the storm drain system. You can continue to wash your car at home. Just wash your car sensibly so the soapy water does not get into the storm drains. These drains are connected to streams, rivers and wetlands.

Q: How do I wash my vehicles and prevent pollution?

A: You can wash your vehicles and prevent stormwater pollution:

- Park the car on grass or an area where the water can filter into the ground and not enter a storm drain. If the driveway drains to an area where it can infiltrate, that works too.
- Divert the wash water away from the storm drain.
- Use a hose with a shut-off valve to reduce possible runoff from the grassy area.
- Dump your soapy water out in the sink or on an area where it will filter into the ground.
- If you don't have a good place to wash your vehicles, you can take it to a commercial car wash (either self-serve or machine wash) where the wash water drains to the sanitary sewer.

Q: How do I tell if a drain goes to sewer or to the stormwater system?

A: Most curbside drains with open grates are connected to the stormwater system. In the summer these drains are generally dry. If there is flow in a storm drain during the dry months, there may be a non-stormwater connection to the storm system or an illicit discharge occurring. Municipal staff can often dye test a drain or questionable connections to determine whether the flow goes to the storm drain system or to the sanitary sewer system. Report any suspected illicit discharges by calling the local stormwater utility hotlines found on the next page.

Q: How will car washing operations work for businesses and charity car washes?

A: Businesses are being required to wash their vehicles in a manner that directs the wash water to the sanitary sewer system. Charity car washes will have a couple of options including using a car wash kit that pumps wash water into a sanitary sewer cleanout or landscaped area. The Wenatchee Valley Stormwater Technical Advisory Committee is currently developing a program to loan car wash kits to nonprofit organizations. The kits should be available by August 2010. Another option is for groups to partner with a commercial carwash and sell tickets for washes or use a bay at a carwash for their event.

Q: Are there any exceptions to what is allowed to be discharged to the storm drain system?

A: There are a few exceptions listed below:

- Potable water with chlorine concentrations less than 0.1 mg/L, pH adjusted, and discharged at a rate that does not cause erosion. Drinking water in the Wenatchee Valley is usually around 0.2 mg/L. Vitamin C or ascorbic acid can be used to remove chlorine.
- Minimal discharges from lawn watering and other irrigation runoff
- Minimal discharges from street & building exterior washing activities, and water used for dust control, provided the water does not contain detergent or soaps and that the areas are swept prior to washing.
- Pool/Spa water with chlorine concentrations less than 0.1 mg/L, pH adjusted, re-oxygenated and discharged at a rate that does not cause erosion. Swimming pool cleaning wastewater and filter backwash are prohibited in the stormwater system. Discontinuing the use of chlorine several days before discharging can help reduce the level of chlorine to below 0.1 mg/L without the use of chemicals. Use a pool test kit to verify that the chlorine is gone before discharging.

Other non-stormwater discharges. Discharges shall be in compliance with the requirements of the NPDES permit issued by the Washington State Department of Ecology.

For more information please visit the
Wenatchee Valley Stormwater Program website:
www.wenatcheewa.gov/WVSTAC
Or
Local Stormwater Utility Hotlines
Chelan County—667-6415
City of Wenatchee—888-3235
City of East Wenatchee & Douglas County—886-3728