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Guidelines for Charity Car Wash Fund Raisers

Car washes to raise funds for charities, schools activities or community groups often occur in densely populated urban areas. Car washing activities can affect water quality if not properly managed. Wash water from these activities may flow into surface waters or into a storm drain. DEQ does not regulate or restrict releases from non-commercial car wash fund-raisers. Charity car washes may be restricted by local governments or the Virginia Department of Transportation under the [Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System \(MS4\) program](#). (The MS4 program regulates the stormwater discharges through storm sewers owned or operated by certain local, state or federal government entities.)

Use of these guidelines is intended for car wash fund-raisers that are temporary and intermittent, not for commercial, business vehicle wash activities that are regulated by the VPDES general permit¹. These guidelines and other voluntary pollution prevention actions will help maintain water quality.

Contact Your Local Government

Before conducting a car wash fund-raiser, contact your local government (environmental/sanitary section) to ensure it is allowable and to obtain any local approval that may be necessary. Some localities may have designated locations where these activities can be held to minimize water quality impacts. Some localities also may provide car wash kits that address best management practices that will help minimize impacts.

Use Best Management Practices (BMPs)

With proper BMP implementation, car wash fund-raisers can be conducted to avoid or minimize releases that reach storm sewers or surface waters. When the BMPs listed below are followed, releases from car wash fund-raisers are not expected to contain pollutants in concentrations that are toxic or would cause or contribute to violations of the Virginia Water Quality Standards (9VAC25-260):



1. Partner with a commercial car wash whenever possible.
2. Wash vehicles in an area designed for vehicle washing where the water is conveyed to the sanitary sewer system for treatment, not the storm sewer system. Be sure to check with the local sewer authority before disposal into the sanitary sewer system.
3. Wash on an area that absorbs water, such as grass, gravel or other permeable surfaces that allow water to infiltrate to the ground rather than run off the ground surface.
4. Avoid washing cars on impermeable surfaces such as concrete or asphalt unless it drains to a vegetated area.
5. Use a plug, seal, boom or other device to block storm drains to prevent the wash water from entering the storm sewer system. Accumulated wash water should be pumped to a vegetated area or allowed to evaporate to avoid a discharge. Be sure to check with the local sewer authority before disposal into the sanitary sewer system.
6. Use biodegradable, phosphate-free water-based cleaners only.
7. Minimize water usage. Use hoses with nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
8. Do not clean engines or wheels with any cleaning agents involving emulsifiers, degreasers (excluding kitchen dish soaps),

strong acids, caustics or other metal brighteners.

9. Contain and clean any spills that occur.
10. Empty buckets of soapy water to the sanitary sewer via a drain, sink or toilet. Be sure to check with the local sewer authority before disposal into the sanitary sewer system.
11. Wash on sunny days, as evaporation of wash water is accelerated.
12. Ensure that any release that occurs from the wash site is free from any foam and/or sheen.

¹Point source discharges to the storm sewer or directly to surface water from any fixed or mobile operation where the manual, automatic or self-service exterior washing of vehicles is conducted are governed by the General Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) Permit for Vehicle Wash Facilities and Laundry Facilities (9VAC25-194).