A-13: Vehicle Washing and Steam Cleaning

Stormwater runoff (rainwater and snow melt) is the largest source of pollution to our lakes, streams and Puget Sound. King County requires businesses to implement measures to protect our shared waters. If the requirements below do not prevent pollution, additional measures are necessary.

The following best management practices (BMPs) apply to all vehicle washing including mobile vehicle washing and detailing services, firefighting equipment, and fleet maintenance. For exterior vessel washing refer to activity sheet A-30: Marine Activities.

Required BMPs

- Commercial and fleet car washing and detailing must be done in a contained area where all water is collected and either recycled or discharged to the sanitary sewer.
- Occasional vehicle washing (less than 5 vehicles, 1-2 times a month) with a mild (pH neutral) soap or detergent on gravel, grass, or loose soil is allowed as long as all the water soaks into the ground (with no possibility of the wash water getting into the stormwater drainage system) and you only wash the exterior (not the engine compartment or undercarriage) of the vehicle.
- The use of “environmentally friendly”, "nontoxic" or “biodegradable” soaps and detergents does NOT make it acceptable to discharge vehicle wash water to any stormwater drain system or surface waters. All soaps and detergents are harmful to aquatic organisms. Additionally, the wash water now contains pollutants such as metals, oil and grease, and dirt that may not be disposed of to any stormwater drainage system or surface water.
- If your business is located in an area designated as a critical aquifer recharge area (CARA), infiltration may not be allowed. For additional information on critical aquifer recharge areas in King County, refer to King County Code 21A.24.311-316.
- Do not wash or rinse vehicles on permeable pavement or pavers.
- Do not wash vehicles on impermeable (conventional) paved areas or wash or rinse the engine compartment or the underside of vehicles, unless you do one of the following:
    - Designate a wash area for all vehicles where the wash water is collected and discharged to the sanitary sewer or is processed through an enclosed recycling system;
    - Use a portable collection system that captures all the wash water for proper disposal; or
    - For the occasional washing of the exterior (not the engine compartment or undercarriage) of vehicles (less than 5 vehicles, 1-2 times a month), ensure that the paved area drains directly to grass, gravel or loose soil and there is no possibility of the wash water getting into the stormwater drainage system
- Do not conduct oil changes or other engine maintenance in the designated washing area.

- Rinsing the outside of a vehicle with water and without any soaps or detergents is allowed as long as the water is filtered prior to discharge to the stormwater drainage system.
- At multifamily properties it may be necessary to post signs at the designated wash areas, indicating where and how vehicle washing must be done.
- Stormwater runoff from vehicle washing areas may not be discharged to underground injection control (UIC) wells. For additional information, refer to BMP activity sheet A-57: Underground Injection Control (UIC).

Additional Information

- Potential pollutants can include: hydrocarbons—such as gasoline and diesel, metals, nutrients, oil and grease, oxygen demanding substances, PCBs, pH, sediment, and other pollutants.
- *Stormwater Pollution Prevention Manual*, Chapter 3: Commercial and Multifamily BMPs
    - A-30: Marine Activities
    - A-57: Underground Injection Control (UIC)
- *Stormwater Pollution Prevention Manual*, Chapter 5: Information Sheets
    - Catch Basin Inserts
    - Disposal
- Washington State Department of Ecology's Vehicle and Equipment Wash Water Discharges/Best Management Practices Manual https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/publications/summarypages/95056.html

For more information or assistance contact the King County Stormwater Services at 206–477–4811 and visit kingcounty.gov/stormwater.