

FACT SHEET: Auto Care and Water Pollution

We all know cars cause air pollution. But did you know cars also cause water pollution? As we drive, our cars and trucks leave “car dirt”—bits of tires, brakes, and rusty metal on the street. When we park, our cars and trucks leave oil, grease, and transmission fluid stains on driveways and parking lots. Cars also collect leaking oils and other fluids and can accumulate other “road dirt.” Less visible are the tiny exhaust particles that gradually settle out of the air or come down with rain or snow.

What happens to the “car dirt,” “road dirt,” and oils and fluids when it rains? Rain and melting snow wash these pollutants off our cars, and they flow across the pavement, down the gutter, into storm drains, and ultimately into our waterways.

Even on sunny days, polluted water continues to flow out of storm sewers. To understand the effects of stormwater runoff, take a walk to a small stream in your town. Is the water clear or is it cloudy? Do you see soapsuds or oily sheens floating on the water? Cloudy water can be from “road dirt” washed in to the storm sewer. Soapsuds may have come from someone washing their car in their driveway. Oily sheens may come from leaking cars or from someone dumping fluids down a storm drain. These scenarios are real and negatively affect the environment.

You can help stop this kind of pollution! Explain to your family and friends that storm sewers do not connect to sewer plants. Instead, they carry water directly to our creeks and rivers. Outlined below are helpful tips for proper auto care:

▶ Recycle Used Motor Oil and Antifreeze

Never pour oil or antifreeze down storm drains or use them to kill weeds. You can recycle old motor oil and antifreeze. Store used oil and antifreeze in an airtight plastic jug or metal can and take it to a community oil-recycling center. Check with your local Borough, Township, or County Solid Waste Authority for an authorized used oil/antifreeze drop-off center. Your local gas station, auto repair shop, or auto parts store may also accept used oil/antifreeze.

▶ Use Commercial Car Washes

Commercial car washes are a good way to protect our creeks and rivers from pollutants. Most commercial car washes recycle their wash water. Any water that is not suitable for reuse goes to a sewer treatment plant for pollutant removal. If you wash cars on a paved driveway or parking lot, the dirty, soapy water runs down the streets, traveling into the storm sewer, and eventually ends up in our waterways. If you must wash your car at home, wash it on the lawn where the soapy water will soak into the ground, filtering out many of the pollutants.

▶ Care for your Car...and your Environment

Of course, not driving is the best way to reduce pollution from our cars. Heavily traveled streets and highways produce the greatest amounts of polluted runoff. The runoff from heavily traveled streets can contain enough zinc, lead, or copper to kill fish and other aquatic life. If you cannot use public transportation, implementing the following best practices will help you maintain your vehicle as well as a healthy and thriving environment:

- Keep your car tuned up and running efficiently. A properly tuned car causes less air and water pollution.
- Promptly repair any oil, grease, antifreeze, or transmission fluid leaks, and clean up any spots using cat litter or other absorbent material.
- Recycle used vehicle batteries. Most auto parts stores will accept old batteries at no charge; some will even pay you for them.
- Sparingly use paints, polishes, and cleaners as many of them are toxic. Never pour these liquids down storm drains.



DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Five quarts of waste oil can create an oil slick the size of two football fields or pollute a million gallons of drinking water.
- ▶ Antifreeze is very poisonous to people and animals. Because of its sweet taste and smell, antifreeze may attract children or pets and other animals. Drinking only three ounces may kill an adult and even less will kill children or pets.
- ▶ Phosphates in soap are a form of fertilizer that causes excess weed and/or algae growth. Weeds and algae decompose and consume oxygen needed by fish, frogs, and crayfish.
- ▶ More than 95 percent of an automotive battery can be recycled, including the old battery acid, which can be turned into chemicals used for laundry detergent.

WE CAN HELP!

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ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY FUNDRAISER

Are you thinking of having a car wash to raise money for charity? Have you thought about teaming up with a local commercial car wash and selling car wash tickets? You would be helping your charity, your local economy, and your environment.

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