

Power Washing

Best Management Practices for the Home Owner

You may not only
be cleaning...
you may be
Polluting our
waterways!



How does power washing harm the environment?

Did you know that storm drains are not connected to the sanitary sewer systems and treatment plants? Whatever enters the catch basins in our parking lots and roads goes untreated into our creeks, streams, rivers and lakes! The primary purpose of storm drains is to carry rainwater away from developed areas to prevent flooding. Wash water from power washing activities may contain significant quantities of oil and grease, chemicals, dirt and detergents. Disposing of these materials into storm drains causes serious ecological problems - and is PROHIBITED by law. You could be given a citation or fined for discharging pollutants to the storm drain system.

Doing the Job Right!

Washing your vehicle...

- Wash vehicles and equipment on grassy or gravel areas so that the wash water can seep into the ground.
If the ground is very dry, wet it first so the wash water soaks in and does not run off into the storm drain.

Preparing for Power Washing

- Prior to any washing, block all storm drains with an impervious barrier such as sandbags or berms, or seal the storm drain with plugs or rubber mats.
- Create a containment area with berms and tarps or take advantage of a low spot to keep wash water contained.
- Check that the wash water is not leaking through the containment.
- Pump or vacuum up all wash water in the contained area.
- Collected water should be pumped or poured into the sanitary sewer through an interior building drain, sink or private sewer clean-out. Wash water disposed into the sanitary sewer should not contain hazardous materials, excessive grease, grit or any material that could clog piping.
- Sediments and other solids that remain on the ground should be swept or vacuumed up immediately before they are washed into the storm drain system.

Try it Dry!

- Instead of pressure washing, determine what alternative dry methods are available.
- Use mops, brooms, rags or wire brushes to clean pavement, buildings and equipment as much as possible.
- Use vacuums or other machines to remove and collect loose debris before applying water



Just Enough for the Job

- Minimize water by using high pressure, low volume nozzles
- Use the minimal amount and least toxic detergents and degreasers you will need to complete the job. Try phosphate free detergents.
- Use a mop or rags to clean heavily soiled areas before power washing.

Biodegradable Soaps

- "Biodegradable" is a popular marketing term that can be misleading. Because a product is labeled as biodegradable does not mean that it is non-toxic. Some products are more toxic than others, but NONE are harmless to aquatic life.
- Soapy water entering the storm drain system will impact the aquatic environment in our local lakes, streams and rivers.

Professional Power Washers

If you are considering hiring a professional power washer, important questions to ask the vendor:

- How do you collect wash water?
Your professional washer should collect the wash water before it drains into the storm drain!
- Where do you dispose of wash water?
Your professional washer should dispose of wash water into the sanitary sewer.

An advertisement banner for NEW Water Wisconsin.org. On the left, a man with green hair is shown in a thinking pose. In the center, a large blue water drop is shown falling into a pool of water, creating ripples. The text "NEW Water Wisconsin.org" is prominently displayed, with "SIMPLE SOLUTIONS FOR CLEANER WATER" underneath. On the right, there is a logo of the state of Wisconsin with a blue water drop inside it, and the acronym "NEWSC" below it. At the bottom, the contact information "Northeast Wisconsin Stormwater Consortium • P.O. Box 1861 • Appleton, Wisconsin 54912 • (920)858-4246" is provided.