

## Outdoor Vehicle Washing:

# Options for Businesses

A Fairfax County, VA  
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**B**usiness owners and managers who plan to wash vehicles outside may not know that this practice may harm the environment, destroy natural habitats and pollute the Chesapeake Bay.

The soap and water that are used to wash vehicles outside often contain motor vehicle fluids, oils and chemicals that flow with the wash water to nearby storm drains, to streams and rivers, eventually reaching the Chesapeake Bay.

In Fairfax County the storm drainage system and the wastewater system are separate. Rain water and melting snow that enter the storm drainage system are not treated at a wastewater treatment plant.

The Stormwater Management Ordinance (Chapter 124, Article 9 of the county code, effective July 1, 2014), prohibits untreated and unpermitted vehicle wash water from entering the storm drainage system or streams.

Business owners and managers who wash vehicles outside have options, listed on the reverse of this fact sheet, to avoid an illegal discharge of wash water. To propose other options, contact the Stormwater Planning Division. Businesses that illegally discharge wash water may be subject to enforcement action or may be referred to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VADEQ) to obtain a Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (VPDES) Permit.

Also, please remember:

- Vehicle washing on a property should be approved by the property owner
- Vehicle washing should be located in a designated area away from storm drains
- Vehicle washing should be indicated on building plans as a preparation area
- Vehicle washing should not:
  - ◊ interfere with fire lanes
  - ◊ interfere with required parking spaces
  - ◊ cause soil erosion
  - ◊ block roadways or loading areas
  - ◊ cause unsafe conditions (icy travel ways).

Any installation of trench drains, sump pumps or other piping may require a land-disturbing or building permit and must meet all Uniform Statewide Building Codes (USBC). Applicable zoning requirements, and all other related county ordinances and standards must be met.

Additional information about the Stormwater Management Ordinance that relates to vehicle wash water is available by calling the Stormwater Planning Division at 703-324-5500, TTY 711 or email [SWPDmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:SWPDmail@fairfaxcounty.gov). For more information about building permits or land disturbance requirements, call the Land Development Services Division at 703-324-1780, TTY 711.



Stormwater Planning Division  
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Fairfax, VA 22035 703-324-5500, FAX 703-802-5955  
email [SWPDmail@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:SWPDmail@fairfaxcounty.gov).

To request this fact sheet in an alternate format call 703-324-5500, TTY 711.

## Please Choose a Vehicle Wash Option

Options 1 or 2 have the least impact to the storm and sanitary sewer systems.

Requirements for All Options		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All water supply connections shall be protected from back flow caused by cross connections.</li> <li>• Any plan that indicates an area as vehicle washing must comply with car wash requirements in Chapter 65 of the county code.</li> <li>• If wash water usage is greater than 5 gallons per minute, then a water recycling system is required.</li> <li>• Activity must not interfere with fire lanes, must meet required minimum parking spaces, should not block roadway or loading areas, or cause icy conditions.</li> <li>• To propose other options, contact the Stormwater Planning Division, 703-324-5500., TTY 711.</li> </ul>		
Options	Descriptions	Requirements
1- Commercial Car Wash	Utilize a commercial car washing facility.	None
2- Dry Method	Use dry methods such as spraying on a cleaning formula and towel wipe off.	None
3- Wash on Grassy Area	Wash vehicle on a grassy surface so the water can infiltrate into the ground.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property owner approval is needed.</li> <li>• Must not cause soil erosion or kill grass.</li> </ul>
4- Bucket and Hose, capture wash water for disposal	Use impervious barriers around wash area and wash using a bucket and hose. Capture wash water via a shop-style vacuum or similar device. Dispose wash water onto grass or pour into an indoor floor or trench drain, or mop sink.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See above requirements for discharging wash water onto grass.</li> <li>• For discharges indoor, the drain must be of sufficient size and not create unsanitary conditions in accordance with the USBC*</li> <li>• Locate wash area away from storm drains or block/cover storm drains during wash activities.</li> <li>• Do not discharge into a sanitary sewer manhole. Must comply with Chapter 67.1-2-1 of the county code.</li> <li>• Vacuum hoses and other equipment should not leak wash water outside containment area.</li> <li>• Impervious barriers should not be removed until all wash water is collected.</li> </ul>
5- Vehicle Wash Service	Contract with a vehicle wash service company that produces minimal wash water, captures the wash water, and disposes of wash water to an indoor floor or trench drain or mop sink.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not discharge into a sanitary sewer manhole. Must comply with Chapter. 67.1-2-1 of the county code.</li> <li>• For discharges indoor, the drain must be of sufficient size and not create unsanitary conditions in accordance with the USBC.</li> <li>• Use impervious barriers around wash area or cover storm drains during wash activities.</li> </ul>
6- VPDES ** Permit	Obtain a VPDES permit from VADEQ*** for discharge to a storm drain.	Contact VADEQ 703-583-3800 or 804-698-4000
7- Install Vehicle Wash Facility	Install a vehicle wash facility that meets all requirements for a vehicle wash facility.	May require obtaining a registered design professional. Required to submit any necessary plans to Building Plan Review and compliance with USBC, Chapters 65 and 67.1 of the county code.

\*USBC Uniform Statewide Building Code

\*\*Virginia Pollutant Discharge Elimination System

\*\*\*Virginia Department of Environmental Quality