



# Pollution Solutions FACT SHEET 10

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU  
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**O**ahu is home to nearly one million residents who have a direct effect on our island environment and water quality.

## WHAT IS STORM WATER?

Storm water suggests large quantities of water (from rain, flooding) at any one given time. Basically, homeowners should keep three things in mind: 1) Storm water that stays on their property and soaks in is a resource helping replenish our ground water; 2) What does runoff should stay as clean as possible before making its way to the nearest storm drain; 3) Unlike the sanitary sewer system, anything dumped into the storm drain system usually flows directly into the nearest stream or drainage channel, usually without any treatment to remove pollutants.

With more than 20,000 storm drain inlets, and over 670 miles of storm drains to clean and maintain, we need your help.

## WHAT IS POLLUTED RUNOFF?

Because impervious surfaces (roofs, driveways, compacted soil, sidewalks, gutters, roads, parking lots, and other urban or developed land) do not allow rain to soak into the ground, the result is urban runoff.

This runoff becomes polluted by litter, pesticides, fertilizers, sediment from construction, bare soil, oil, pet waste, grass clippings and leaves that it picks up along the way to storm drains. In addition to rain, various human activities like irrigation, car washing, and malfunctioning septic tank can also be the source of polluted runoff.

When polluted runoff reaches a water body it can have a harmful impact on the plants and animals in and around the water. It can also affect humans who swim or fish in the water, or whose drinking water comes from the water body.

## WHAT ARE POLLUTANTS?

“Pollutant” means any waste, cooking or fuel oil, waste milk, waste juice, pesticide, paint, solvent, radioactive waste, hazardous substance, sewage, dredged spoils, chemical waste, rock, sand, biocide, toxic substance, construction waste and material, and soil sediment. The term also includes commercial FOG waste as defined under Section 14-5A.1.

# CAR WASHING TIPS FOR RESIDENTS



If you let soapy water go down the storm drain, you might as well wash your car in the ocean.

## WHAT ARE BMPs?

Many simple yet effective methods can be used to help minimize individual runoff. These are called Best Management Practices or BMPs. Some storm water BMPs can be implemented when first planning and building the home and designing the landscape. Others are incorporated into daily activities. The cumulative impact from all residents in a watershed, the land area that “sheds water” to a single body of water, can have a big impact on water quality.

Here are 9 simple actions you can do around your home to be an Everyday Clean Water Hero!

1. **Keep It Clean:** It is your responsibility to keep sidewalks, curbs and gutters in front of your property clean.
2. **No Dumping:** Stencil storm drains with the message, “No Dumping, Drains To Ocean,” to help the community make the connection between neighborhood storm drains and local waterways used for drinking water and recreation.
3. **Do It Right:** Use water-based paints whenever possible. Never clean brushes or rinse paint containers in the street, gutter or near a storm drain. Clean water-based paints in the sink, and oilbased paints with thinner. Wrap dried paint residue in newspaper or harden in its container and dispose of it in the trash.
4. **Don't Be An Oil Drip:** Identify and fix oil leaks on your vehicle; clean up drips and spills with absorbent material; dispose of used oil in oil change box.
5. **Car Wash:** See below
7. **Read The Label:** Read and follow the label on all fertilizers and pesticides.
8. **Yard Maintenance:** Gather grass, leaves, and yard trimmings for proper disposal or composting.
9. **Pick It Up:** Remove and dispose of pet waste before your leave an area.

## COMMERCIAL CAR WASH

This is the best option to keep harmful chemicals from entering our streams and the ocean. Commercial car wash water is recycled and sent to the wastewater plant for treatment.

## CAR WASHING AT HOME

When washing your car at home, wash it on grass, gravel or a pervious surface, e.g. grass pavers so water can soak into the ground (infiltrate), not into the storm drains. If the driveway drains to a place where water can infiltrate, that is okay. If you wash your car in a driveway or City street, use water and phosphorous-free soap sparingly with a bucket, sponge, and nozzle on the end of the hose to conserve water and minimize the amount of phosphates entering storm drains, streams and the ocean. Excess phosphates decrease water quality and harm aquatic life.

BE AN EVERYDAY  
CLEAN WATER



**D**ischarging pollutants to the storm drain system is against the law. Violations of the Clean Water Act can result in fines of up to \$25,000 per violation, per day.

**K**now the law to avoid fines. The Clean Water Act gave the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the authority to implement water pollution control programs. In an effort to comply with the EPA's mandate, the Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, Section 14-12.23(a) Environmental Quality Control - Violation states, "It shall be unlawful for any person to discharge or cause to be discharged any pollutant into any drainage facility which causes a pollution problem in state waters, or causes a violation of any provision of the city NPDES permit or the water quality standards of the State of Hawaii."

## Be A Part Of The Solution

The City and County of Honolulu, working under Federal Clean Water Act Guidelines, has a number of public education programs that focus on community involvement and targeted enforcement to eliminate or reduce illegal discharge practices. Existing projects such as Adopt-A-Stream, including storm drain stenciling, World Water Monitoring Day, Earth Month Teen Video Contest, Earth Month Mauka to Makai Clean, Annual Pearl Harbor Bike Path Cleanup, and workshops provide opportunities to educate an interested and committed neighborhood. To volunteer or donate call 768-3248.



## Report It, Who to Call

As a resident, you can make a difference, both on the job and in your community. When you're at home, share your knowledge with neighbors and family. As you drive to work, report any illegal discharge.

Spill Response (Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response)

- Local (HFD): 911 (24/7)

- State (HSERC): 586-4249 (business hours), 247-2191 (after hours)

Illegal storm water discharge, already occurred 768-3247

NPDES permitting questions 768-3287

Storm water public participation and involvement 768-3248

Storm drain connection license 768-8106

Clean stream hotline (report potential flood problem) 768-7890

Residential code enforcement: 768-8280 (Complaint investigations related to zoning and housing code for one and two family dwellings,

sidewalk maintenance, vacant lot overgrowth, animal structures and setbacks)

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Residential Car Washing and Storm Water

Q: Is it illegal to wash my car on a City street?

A: No. The City holds a storm water permit that requires implementation of an ordinance to prohibit putting anything down the storm drains containing pollutants such as soapy water. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has interpreted the phrase "individual residential car washing" as applying to residents of both single family and multi-family residences. Residential car washing is not a violation as it is specifically excluded from the permit. Because of this, the City is using an educational approach for residential car washing. However, the City is still tasked by EPA to reduce the discharge of pollutants to the maximum extent practicable, and will do this primarily by educating the public about best management practices to achieve this requirement.

Q: Why is there a problem with car wash water going into storm drains?

A: Water that enters the storm drain goes into pipes and directly into our streams and ultimately to near shore waters. This wash water (and storm water) does NOT go to the wastewater (sewer) treatment plant like water from your sinks and toilets. It is NOT treated before going into our waterways. Car wash water contains pollutants such as soap, oil, grease, heavy metals, and dirt. Excess phosphates in soapy water can decrease water quality and harm aquatic life.

Q: How can my few gallons of soapy water cause damage?

A: One of the biggest contribution to water pollution is storm water. Storm water runs off paved surfaces and collects all the pollutants that accumulates between storms, such as soap, oil, grease, dirt, pet waste, and trash. The accumulation of all the pollutants adds up. By doing our part to prevent pollution, washing our cars carefully, picking up after our pets, being careful with pesticides and fertilizers, we can help minimize and prevent pollution.

Q: What about the big fundraising car washes for schools and youth organizations?

A: Fundraiser car washing activities are prohibited if dirty water discharges to the storm drain. Here are some charity car wash options to assist in preventing pollution:

1. Sell commercial car wash coupons from local car wash companies. This allows you to sell tickets any time of year, expand fundraising beyond one event, and doesn't leave you dependent on the weather.
2. Conduct fundraising events at locations with designated wash areas to:
  - Infiltrate runoff into soil, surface, e.g. gravel, grass, permeable surface
  - Retain/detain runoff, e.g. plug or collect wash water
  - Filter runoff slowly through vegetation, e.g. native plants, trees
  - Pump harmful wash water to the sanitary sewer system. All discharges routed to the sanitary sewer system requires an Industrial Wastewater Discharge Permit; contact 768-3262 or 768-3263.
  - Remember to use water, phosphorous-free soap, sparingly, with a bucket, sponge and nozzle on the end of a hose to conserve water and minimize the amount of phosphates entering storm drains, streams and the ocean.

Q: How do I wash my car to prevent pollution?

A: Wash your car at home and prevent storm water pollution:

- Park your car on grass, gravel or a pervious surface, e.g. grass pavers so water can soak into the ground (infiltrate), not into the storm drains. If the driveway drains to a place where water can infiltrate, that is okay.
- Dump soapy water into the sink or a place water can soak into the ground (infiltrate).
- If you wash your car in a driveway or City street, use water and phosphorous-free soap, sparingly, with a bucket, sponge, and nozzle on the end of the hose, to conserve water and minimize the amount of phosphates entering storm drains, streams and the ocean. Excess phosphates decrease water quality and harm aquatic life.
- If these options are not available, take your car to a commercial car wash where the wash water is recycled and sent to the wastewater plant for treatment.

Q: Is the City going to fine me for washing my car in the driveway?

A: No. The City is taking a public education approach to residential car washing. Overtime, we expect to see habits change.