



Best Management Practices: Washing with Soap

What's wrong with soap? When soapy water enters the storm drain system, it goes directly into our lakes, rivers, creeks and the Puget Sound. Soap is harmful to fish and other aquatic species. It often contains phosphates and other chemicals that can cause excess algae growth. When algae die, they sink to the bottom and decompose in a way that removes oxygen from the water and limits the supply for aquatic life. Even "biodegradable soap" is toxic to fish and other aquatic species. Biodegradable only means the soap will break down over time. This fact sheet will give you alternatives to using soap for cleaning and if soap is necessary, how to use it safely.

Where Does Waste Water Go?

- **Storm drain system** - The storm drain system was built to prevent flooding by collecting and transporting rain (stormwater) away from urban areas. Soap, and any other residue or debris on the pavement, flows into the storm drain system and goes directly into our lakes, rivers, creeks and the Puget Sound, without treatment.
- **Combined sewer system** - The combined sewer carries both sanitary sewage and stormwater runoff in a single pipe to the West Point Treatment Plant next to Discovery Park. The water is treated before it's discharged into Puget Sound; however, during heavy rainfall, when the combined sewers reach their capacity, the excess stormwater and *untreated* sewage overflow into the Puget Sound.
- **Sanitary sewer system** - The sanitary sewer carries wastewater and sewage from internal floor drains, toilets and sinks in homes and businesses to the West Point Treatment Plant next to Discovery Park. The water is treated before it is discharged into the Puget Sound. Although sewage is very unsanitary, the term "sanitary sewer" is used because the sewer pipes are separate from the pipes used for stormwater drainage.

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Where Do My Drains Flow?

Storm drains are the openings you see along curbs and in streets and parking lots. Since the inlet for the stormwater drainage and combined sewer systems look the same, how do you know which ones you have on your property? The Resource Venture has access to the City of Seattle's digital drainage and wastewater data and can provide maps to help you identify where your drains flow.

Boat Washing

- Soaps and detergents – including biodegradable soaps or soaps described as friendly to the environment – should not be used to wash the top-sides of boats when the wash water will enter a lake, river or the Puget Sound.
- To avoid soap, scrub and rinse your boat often with cold water. A quick rinse after each outing reduces the need to scrub the top-side with soap.

Mat Washing at Restaurants

- When hosing down mats outside, use only cold water. If soap is needed, wash and hose down the mats inside so that the wash water goes down an internal floor drain to the sanitary sewer.

Cleaning Parking Lots, Driveways & Sidewalks

Your business is required to implement the following best management practices to comply with the City of Seattle's Stormwater Code:

- Sweep paved areas regularly with a broom, vacuum truck or mechanical sweeper to remove debris, litter and other material that accumulates. The frequency of sweeping should be monthly, or as needed, depending on site conditions. Collected materials must be disposed of as regular garbage.
- Do not sweep loose litter and solids into the street or gutter unless material will be immediately removed for disposal. Debris and other material should not be disposed in the storm drain, sanitary sewer or combined sewer systems.

Using water to hose down paved areas is discouraged because soap and sediment that enters the storm drain goes directly into our lakes, creeks and the Puget Sound, without treatment.

Washing Vehicles & Equipment

Soap also has to be managed properly when washing vehicles and equipment. For more information on these topics, refer to the fact sheet *Best Management Practices: Vehicles and Equipment Washing*. You can download the fact sheet at www.resourceventure.org/rv/issues/stormwater/publications/index.php.

At Your Service

The Resource Venture provides free environmental consulting services to Seattle-area businesses. We help companies lower their utility costs, obtain rebates, comply with regulations and receive public recognition, all while protecting the environment. Since 1990, the Resource Venture has helped thousands of businesses recycle, use less water, prevent stormwater pollution and build sustainably. We are a program of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Seattle Public Utilities.

