

Wash Your Car With Earth-Friendly Results

ByEarth911

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Many people don't realize that washing our cars in the driveway is not environmentally friendly. In fact, it's one of the most environmentally unfriendly chores one can do around the house.

Our household wastewater enters sewers or septic systems and gets treated before it is released back into the environment. But the same can't be said for the water you use when you wash your car at home. Water that flows down our driveways, an impenetrable surface, typically finds its way into storm drains — eventually reaching waterways, lakes, and oceans.

When we wash our cars at home, the dirty water that washes into storm drains has been mixed with fuel, oil, and residue from exhaust fumes — as well as harsh cleansers. These contaminants are devastating to our creeks, streams, rivers, and **wetlands** — and the creatures and plants that depend on healthy waterways.

Now, more than 1,500 commercial car washes use environmentally responsible washing systems that capture and reprocess water and clean out pollutants. You can find participating car washes by looking for the **WaterSavers** designation.



I recently added the system to my car wash business, Huntsville Auto Detailing. Here is what I've learned and how you can choose the best car wash for the planet.

Commercial Car Washes Treat & Conserve Water

The handling of wastewater at commercial car wash facilities in the U.S. and Canada is regulated. They are required by federal law to drain their wastewater into sewer systems. Essentially, this ensures the water is treated before it is released once again into nature.

Not only are car washes regulated very tightly, but they must also minimize their water usage. Typically, they have computer systems and high-pressure nozzles and pumps that lower their water use.

The **International Carwash Association**, a “nonprofit trade group representing the retail and supply segments of the professional car wash industry,” offers eye-opening statistics about water use for car washing. Washing a vehicle at home regularly consumes somewhere in the range of 80 to 140 gallons of water, while a commercial wash uses under 45 gallons per vehicle.

I pride myself on the fact that my car wash recycles and reuses 65% of the water we use at our facility. Over the past few months, my car wash has focused on minimizing our eco-footprint. Our average water usage per vehicle dropped from 42 gallons in 2018 to 18 gallons in 2019.

Water-Saving Techniques From a Car Wash Owner

If you're a car wash owner who wants to improve your commercial car wash, consider each of the following steps:

1. **Employee training:** In order to drastically lower your eco-footprint, employees must be committed to the goal. An employee who works a bit harder to reduce water usage is one that you want on your team, even if it means paying them a bit extra.
2. **Advertising:** You may be wondering, how does advertising lower our water usage? Well, it doesn't have a direct impact; but indirectly, the impact is massive. When we started advertising that we use less water than the competition, our traffic spiked. Our customers are genuinely concerned about our water use practices. By publicly stating your new practices, you help customers hold you accountable.
3. **Recycling:** Recycling water is a bit tougher to do if you don't already have the program in place. For us to recycle our water, we have a pit under the washing track that collects our water. This water is then pumped back into our pre-wash tank. Building a pit is expensive and involves construction, so this may not be an option for everyone. However, in the long run, you will save on water bills and help preserve this valuable natural resource.

Think Green When Washing Your Car

If you decide to wash at home, use a biodegradable cleanser specifically designed for cars. But even with a biodegradable cleanser, try to prevent run-off by using as little water as possible to avoid polluting waterways.

We use NatureShield's Eco-Friendly Car Wash Concentrate Strong and Safe, but we are in no way sponsored by them. The product is biodegradable and does not emit **volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**. A quick Google search will find you multiple **biodegradable cleaning products** that aren't dangerous for our precious environment.

Waterless Car Wash

You don't have to wash your whole car to clean a spot.

When a customer prefers a waterless wash, we have a few services that can accommodate this choice. I'll touch on our most popular: spot cleaning. Essentially, we use a spray bottle containing a waterless solution to clean small spots on the car one at a time. This technique is very time-consuming, but it is worth the work since it results in 0 gallons of water usage.

How To Make a Difference

As a car wash owner who wants to do right by the planet, I urge you to support local car washes that are dedicated to reducing their water and ecological footprints! Next time you visit a commercial car

wash, take notice of how the company operates. Ask questions about the environmental safety of their products, their water use, and whether they recycle their water. It's not difficult, but it's a change that we as consumers need to make.

Editor's note: *This article was originally published on October 10, 2019; it was updated in July 2023 to reflect that Huntsville Auto Detailing has discontinued operations.*

About the Author

Contributor Michael Orso was the owner of Alabama-based Huntsville Auto Detailing, which closed since 2019.