

What is Nonpoint Source Pollution?

Nonpoint source pollution comes from runoff rather than a specific source (like a pipe). Nonpoint source pollution is also called polluted runoff and is frequently created by stormwater. Stormwater is from rain or melting snow. It flows from rooftops, over paved streets, sidewalks and parking lots, across bare soil, and through lawns and storm drains. As it flows, runoff collects and transport soil, pet waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease litter and other pollutants. This water drains directly into nearby creeks, streams and aquifers, without receiving treatment at sewage plants. Polluted stormwater contaminates streams, and aquifers. It can kill or damage plants, fish and wildlife while degrading the quality of our water.

The majority of water pollution in the United States is caused by nonpoint sources!



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Prevent Pollution while Caring for Your Car

The car is clean but what about the water?



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Maintain your car, wash it the right way, and prevent nonpoint source water pollution!

How Does My Car Affect Water Quality?

When the weather warms up and the rain stops coming down, nothing is more satisfying than a sparkling clean car to head off on an adventure. Many people aren't aware that washing all that grime off their vehicles or not getting that small leak taken care of might actually be causing harm to waterways and groundwater.

Washing one car may not seem to be a problem, but collectively car washing adds up to big problems as a part of nonpoint source pollution. Water entering storm drains and street gutters does not undergo treatment, unlike water that enters sanitary sewers and septic tanks, before it is discharged or drains into waterbodies. When cars are washed on streets and driveways, that dirty water eventually winds up in the ocean, streams, or groundwater. Fluids from leaks and other pollutants that are created from your car sit on the streets until they are washed away untreated too.



What's the Problem?

The United States has millions of cars

We have over 260 million cars – even if each pollutes a tiny bit, it adds up.

Home car washes can use a lot of water

The average person uses 116 gallons of water to wash a car! A running hose uses about 10 gallons a minute. This accumulates quickly even when using a bucket for everything but rinsing.

Cars contain many chemicals

- Oil, petroleum products and other toxins from automobiles kill fish, plants, aquatic life and even people. One quart of oil can contaminate 250,000 gallons of water because it doesn't dissolve.
- Many brake pads contain metals that wear away a little by little. The metal breaks down into dust each time you apply the brakes. Brake pads can contain as much as 20 percent copper, which is toxic to aquatic life at the base of the food chain. They also contain lead and zinc.
- Residue from car exhaust, heavy metals from rust, rubber from tires, and any other chemicals picked up from the road get incorporated into wash water.

Most soaps contain phosphates

Phosphates can cause excess algae to grow. Excessive algae smell bad, look bad, and harm water quality.

What Can You Do?

- Use a commercial car wash. Most locations reuse wash water several times before sending it to a treatment plant. Each car wash averages about 50 gallons with only 10–15 gallons of new water.
- Use biodegradable, non-toxic, and phosphate free soaps.
- Minimize water usage. Use a bucket for washing. To rinse, use a spray nozzle that automatically shuts off to minimize water volume and runoff.
- Wash on an area that absorbs water, like gravel or grass. This filters water before it enters groundwater, storm drains, or waterbodies. Avoid washing cars on concrete, asphalt, or pavement.
- Empty wash buckets into sinks/toilets or porous surfaces rather than in the storm drain or street.
- Dispose of used oil, antifreeze, paints and other household chemicals properly – not in storm sewers or drains. The Morongo Environmental Protection Department hosts periodic household hazardous waste days for Morongo residents. Local cities and counties also have similar events.
- Clean up spilled brake fluid, oil, grease, and antifreeze. Do not hose them into the street where they can eventually reach local streams and lakes.