



Washing wisely – what you need to know when washing your car

The dirt on cars can contain toxic chemicals, heavy metals, oil and grease. When you wash a car in your driveway or on the street, that dirty water runs into the storm sewers and straight into local waterways, contributing to water pollution and affecting Lake Ontario's water quality.

To avoid having dirty water run into the storm sewer system, consider these options for washing your car:

- **Use a commercial car wash facility (automatic or coin).** These facilities are required to follow a set of practices determined by the City, including treating wastewater and discharging it into the sanitary sewer system where it will receive further treatment.
- **Find a location where the wastewater won't flow into the storm sewer.** For example, washing cars on a gravel surface or grass allows the wastewater to be absorbed before it reaches the storm sewer.
- **Dispose of the wastewater into the sanitary sewer.** By using a pail, washcloth and only a small amount of water, and then wiping the car dry, the waste water can be contained in the bucket and disposed of into the sanitary sewer through a laundry sink or toilet. From there it will go to a City wastewater treatment plant.

All of these options will help protect public health and aquatic environments from the harmful effects of dirty water entering the storm sewers.

It is important to be aware that there are two types of sewer systems in the City of Toronto.

- The sanitary system takes the used water from homes and businesses to a wastewater treatment plant.
- The storm sewer system — the square grates on the side of the road — takes rainwater and melted snow from the streets and releases it, untreated, into local streams, rivers, and Lake Ontario.

The City of Toronto has the Sewers Bylaw (Municipal Code, Chapter 681) which controls the quality and quantity of substances discharged into the sanitary and stormwater sewer systems and natural watercourses. You can report suspected spills into the storm sewer by calling 311.