



Photo Credit: Geoff Brosseau

## Description

Wash water from vehicle and equipment cleaning activities performed outdoors or in areas where wash water flows onto the ground can contribute toxic hydrocarbons and other organic compounds, oils and greases, nutrients, phosphates, heavy metals, and suspended solids to stormwater runoff. Use of the procedures outlined below can prevent or reduce the discharge of pollutants to stormwater during vehicle and equipment cleaning.

## Approach

Reduce potential for pollutant discharge through source control pollution prevention and BMP implementation. Successful implementation depends on effective training of employees on applicable BMPs and general pollution prevention strategies and objectives

## Pollution Prevention

- If possible, use properly maintained off-site commercial washing and steam cleaning businesses whenever possible. These businesses are better equipped to handle and properly dispose of the wash waters.
- Good housekeeping practices can minimize the risk of contamination from wash water discharges.

## Objectives

- Cover
- Contain
- Educate
- Reduce/Minimize
- Product Substitution

## Targeted Constituents

Sediment	✓
Nutrients	✓
Trash	
Metals	✓
Bacteria	
Oil and Grease	✓
Organics	✓



# SC-21 Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning

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## *Suggested Protocols*

### *General*

- Use biodegradable, phosphate-free detergents for washing vehicles as appropriate.
- Mark the area clearly as a wash area.
- Post signs stating that only washing is allowed in wash area.
- Provide trash container in wash area.
- Map on-site storm drain locations to avoid discharges to the storm drain system.
- Emphasize the connection between the storm drain system and runoff, help reinforce that car washing activities affect local water quality through storm drain stenciling programs.

### *Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning*

- Have all vehicle washing done in areas designed to collect and hold the wash and rinse water or effluent generated. Recycle, collect or treat wash water effluent prior to discharge to the sanitary sewer system.
- If washing/cleaning must occur on-site, consider washing vehicle equipment inside the building or on an impervious surface to control the targeted constituents by directing them to the sanitary sewer.
- If washing must occur on-site and outdoor:
  - Use designated paved wash areas. Designated wash areas must be well marked with signs indicating where and how washing must be done. This area must be covered or bermed to collect the wash water and graded to direct the wash water to a treatment or disposal facility.
  - Do not conduct oil changes and other engine maintenance in the designated washing area. Perform these activities in a place designated for oil change and maintenance activities.
  - Cover the wash area when not in use to prevent contact with rain water.
- Install sumps or drain lines to collect wash water for treatment.
- Use hoses with nozzles that automatically turn off when left unattended.
- Do not permit steam cleaning wash water to enter the storm drain.
- Pressure and steam clean off-site to avoid generating runoff with high pollutant concentrations. If done on-site, no pressure cleaning and steam cleaning should be done in areas designated as wellhead protection areas for public water supply.

## *Disposal*

- Consider filtering and recycling wash water.
- Discharge equipment wash water to the sanitary sewer, a holding tank, or a process treatment system, regardless of the washing method used.
- Collect all wash water from vehicle cleaning operations and (1) discharge to a sanitary sewer, holding tank, or process treatment system or (2) run through an enclosed recycling system.
- Collect and treat wash water at the facility and either recycle or discharge to the sanitary sewer system or collect and dispose of as an industrial waste.
- Discharge wash water to sanitary sewer after contacting local sewer authority to find out if pretreatment is required.

## *Training*

- Train employees on proper cleaning and wash water disposal procedures and conduct “refresher” courses on a regular basis.
- Train staff on proper maintenance measures for the wash area.
- Train employees and contractors on proper spill containment and cleanup. The employee should have the tools and knowledge to immediately begin cleaning up a spill should one occur.

## *Spill Response and Prevention*

- Keep the Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plan up-to-date.
- Have an emergency plan, equipment, and trained personnel ready at all times to deal immediately with major spills.
- Collect all spilled liquids and properly dispose of them.
- Store and maintain appropriate spill cleanup materials in a location known to all near the designated wash area.

## *Other Considerations (Limitations and Regulations)*

- Some municipalities may require pretreatment and monitoring of wash water discharges to the sanitary sewer.
- Steam cleaning can generate significant pollutant concentrations requiring that careful consideration be given to the environmental impacts and compliance issues related to steam cleaning.
- Most car washing best management practices are inexpensive, and rely more on good housekeeping practices (where vehicles are washed, planning for the collection of wash water) than on expensive technology. However, the construction of a specialized area for vehicle washing can be expensive. Also, for facilities that cannot recycle their wash water, the cost of pre-treating wash water through either structural practices or planning for

# SC-21 Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning

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collection and hauling of contaminated water to sewage treatment plants can be cost-prohibitive.

## Requirements

### *Costs*

- Capital costs vary as follows depending on measures implemented:
  - Low cost (\$2000-5,000) for berm construction
  - Medium cost (\$10,000-30,000) for plumbing modifications (including re-routing discharge to sanitary sewer and installing simple sump)
  - High cost (\$60,000-200,000) for on-site treatment and recycling
- O&M costs increase with increasing capital investment.

### *Maintenance*

- Perform berm repair and patching.
- Sweep washing areas frequently to remove solid debris.
- Inspect and maintain sumps, oil/water separators, and on-site treatment/recycling units.

## Supplemental Information

### *Design Considerations*

#### *Designated Cleaning Areas*

- Washing operations outside should be conducted in a designated wash area having the following characteristics:
  - Paved with Portland cement concrete
  - Covered and bermed to prevent contact with stormwater and contain wash water
  - Sloped for wash water collections
  - Discharges wash water to the sanitary or recycle treatment process waste sewer, or to a dead-end sump
  - Equipped with an oil/water separator if necessary

### *Examples*

The City of Palo Alto has an effective program for commercial vehicle service facilities. Many of the program's elements, including specific BMP guidance and lists of equipment suppliers, are applicable to industrial vehicle service facilities.

The U.S. Postal Service in West Sacramento has a new vehicle wash system that collects, filters, and recycles wash water.

# **Vehicle and Equipment Cleaning** **SC-21**

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## **References and Resources**

California's Nonpoint Source Program Plan <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/nps/index.html>

Clark County Storm Water Pollution Control Manual  
<http://www.co.clark.wa.us/pubworks/bmpman.pdf>

King County Storm Water Pollution Control Manual <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/dss/spcm.htm>

Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program <http://www.scvurppp.org>

The Storm Water Managers Resource Center <http://www.stormwatercenter.net>

