

# Austin guide to... charity CAR WASHES



**Did you know that something as beneficial as a charity car wash can actually damage the environment? Oil, grease and dirt from the cars can be washed off into our creeks and make our waterways less suitable for plant growth, fish life, and recreation. Soaps used to clean the cars can contain nutrients which cause algae blooms. When the algae dies off, it can lead to fish kills and cause our drinking water to smell and taste badly. Excessive vegetation can also clog storm drain inlets and cause flooding. But, a little planning can help you avoid polluting as well as save you costly fines -- the result is beneficial for both your organization and the environment.**

### *Solution Options:*

- **Check with the Southwest Car Wash Association at 512-343-9023 – they have a list of car washes and gas stations that send their wash water to a wastewater treatment plant (since sites are limited, be flexible on your date and location)**

- If there are no suitable car washes or gas stations available, send wash water to a grassy area or storm water filtration pond:
  - Pre-clean paved areas – sweep and dispose of trash, dirt, leaves and debris first
  - Spot clean heavily stained areas with a mixture of kitty litter, water and powdered soap, and then toss in the trash prior to conducting event
  - Use only plain, cold water for washing
  - Wash windows and tires with cleaners and then wipe off instead of rinsing with water
  - If you need a cleanser, use a biodegradable detergent -- most liquid dish detergents, which are free of dyes and perfumes, are considered biodegradable

*Be on the Safe Side:*

- Notify the Watershed Protection and Development Review Department in advance. They can pre-approve:
  - Your site or offer information on nearby storm water filtration ponds
  - Car wash method
  - Cleaning agent
- If you plan to drain to a grassy area, get approval in advance from the property owner
- Do not discharge wash water to oil/grit separators

*Contact Information:*

**Stormwater Discharge Program:**

**City of Austin Watershed Protection  
(512) 974-2550**

**Sanitary Sewer Discharge Regulations**

**City of Austin Water Utility  
(512) 972-1060**

**Commercial Car Wash Locations**

**Southwest Car Wash Association  
(512) 343-9023      1-800-440-0644**



**512-974-2550**