



## **HOW TO SET UP AND RUN AN ECO-FRIENDLY CAR WASH** **A PRIMER FOR FUND RAISERS AND FAMILIES**

Prepared by the Batavia Environmental Commission  
and the City of Batavia Engineering Department

A typical car wash generates the following environmental hazards: dirty water containing soap and detergents, petroleum and motor oils residues washed off the cars, and residues from exhaust fumes. These contaminants flow off the pavement and into nearby storm drains (openings in the curb/gutter).

Unlike the water we use in our homes and businesses that is treated at wastewater treatment plants, most of the water that goes into storm drains flows directly into the Fox River without any kind of treatment. To minimize these possible impacts to our environment, the Batavia Environmental Commission in conjunction with the Engineering Department suggest the following "Good Housekeeping Practices" for an event that is both economically successful and ecologically safe.

### **GOOD HOUSEKEEPING PRACTICES FOR CAR WASH FUNDRAISING EVENTS**

Set up the car wash area keeping the following ideas in mind:

- Prior to setting up the car wash area, remove all trash and debris and properly dispose and /or recycle the waste.
- Whenever possible, select a site where the cars can be driven onto a grass or gravel area for washing where the wash water will drain into grass, gravel, or landscaping prior to discharging into the storm sewer. This will allow the soapy water to filter through vegetation and soil first and also waters the grass!
- Only use soaps, cleaners, or detergents labeled "non-toxic", "phosphate-free", or "biodegradable". The safest products for the environment are vegetable-based or citrus-based soaps which are readily available.
- Make sure that cars are not left idling during the car wash.

To minimize the amount of water/soapy wash water running off the car washing area try implementing the following:

- Use the minimum amount of water you can to wet the car's surface.
- Always shut off or kink the hose(s) when not in use. Automatic hose shut off valves are available from hardware stores for approximately \$2.00.
- Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash rather than adding more soap directly to the rag/sponge. Consider using microfiber towels.
- Use the minimum amount of water you can to rinse the car's surface.
- When possible do not empty buckets of soapy or rinse water onto the car washing area or into the street, gutter, or storm drains. Try to empty the buckets into outlets that connect to the sanitary sewer system such as sinks or toilets.
- Wring sponges and wash rags into buckets, not onto the ground.
- Shake car mats into a trash can or vacuum them. Do not shake dirt from car mats directly onto the ground.
- Avoid the use of petroleum and acid-based wheel and chrome cleaners as some can be carcinogenic.
- Clean up the site after the event by picking up any trash and debris and dispose or recycle it properly.



## **WATER CONSERVATION**

Equally important as ensuring that runoff from your car wash fundraising event does not flow into local storm drains is water conservation. The average car wash uses between 40 and 80 gallons of water per car! This leads to thousands of gallons of water used during a car wash fundraising event. The following are some possible suggestions for cleaning vehicles with the least amount of water possible:

- Always turn off nozzles or kink the hose when you are not spraying a car.
- When possible, use a pressure washer with an automatic shut off. Using a pressure washer allows approximately 50 cars to be washed with the same amount of water used to wash one car using a regular garden hose – a significant amount of water saved! This will reduce the wet/rinse cycle to a little over one gallon of water/car. Check with local contractors who may be willing to donate one of their pressure washing units.
- Using a pressure washer on fine mist spray, can apply water evenly on the vehicle and subsequently the water will be spread evenly on the ground allowing the water to evaporate or be absorbed quicker and greatly reducing the amount of water reaching the storm drains.
- Consider using waterless car wash cleaners such as: Eco-touch, Freedom waterless, Dry Wash, No Wet, and Lucky Earth with reusable towels.

## **OTHER ECO-FRIENDLY CAR MAINTENANCE TIPS**

While the car and its driver are there, the group can suggest some simple tips to help the driver improve the efficiency of the vehicle and minimize its environmental impact. These tips might include maintaining proper tire pressure, keeping the engine properly tuned, using the right grade of oil, replacing clogged air filters and reduced idling. Additional tips and information are available at <http://www.fueleconomy.gov/FEG/maintain.shtml>.

## **CLEAN UP**

It is imperative that the group cleans up the entire event location before leaving the site. Adequate locations for car wash fundraisers can be difficult to find and if sites are not cleaned up, you may hurt your group, along with other non-profit groups in Batavia who may also need the that location to raise funds by having future car washes at that location.

If the event area is on a non-porous surface, the area should also be rinsed down with a hose or pressure washer to clean off any residues. When rinsing the area, make sure that the Good Housekeeping Practices listed above are followed. Also, collect and reuse all the towels at your next car wash.

For more information, contact:

Andrea M. Rattray, P.E., City of Batavia Eng. Dept.  
(630) 454-2757 [arattray@cityofbatavia.net](mailto:arattray@cityofbatavia.net)