



Washing Equipment and Vehicles



Why be concerned?

Washing equipment and vehicles can generate significant amounts of polluted runoff. In addition to detergent, oil, grease, heavy metals, sediment and other pollutants, wash water can contain grease cutters, acids and other toxic chemicals. Take steps to prevent untreated wash water from soaking into the ground or from entering the stormwater management system.



Minimizing Runoff

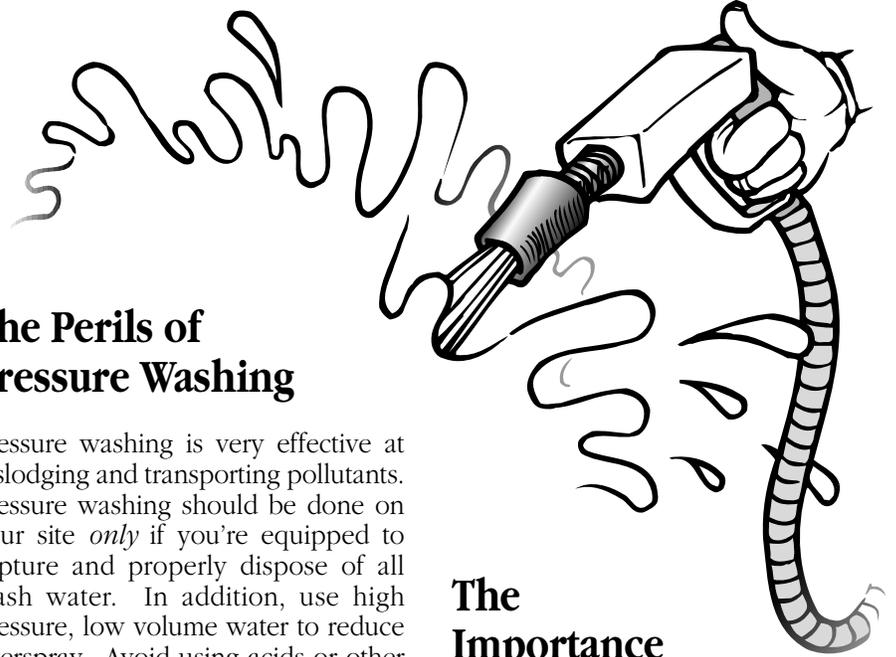
Clean field equipment and vehicles using as little water as possible. For example, remove dirt and grit with wire brushes or other dry methods before applying solvent or water. Be sure to collect the dislodged material and dispose of it properly. To determine proper disposal, call the facility where you expect the material to be taken.

The Perils of Pressure Washing

Pressure washing is very effective at dislodging and transporting pollutants. Pressure washing should be done on your site *only* if you're equipped to capture and properly dispose of all wash water. In addition, use high pressure, low volume water to reduce overspray. Avoid using acids or other harsh cleaning products and detergents that contain phosphates.

Washing: It's An Inside Job

In view of state permit requirements and potential threats to the environment, it's best to take vehicles and equipment to a commercial washing facility if you can't wash them indoors.



The Importance of Designated Wash Areas

If you must wash equipment or vehicles on-site, wash them *only* in clearly marked, designated areas that are designed to properly manage waste water. Post signs that prohibit other maintenance activities and washing with solvents.

Never locate wash areas within a floodplain or within 100 feet of a drinking water well, wetland, lake, stream or any other part of the stormwater management system.

Managing Wash Water

Discharge wash water only to the sanitary sewer, an enclosed holding tank, or, if it's relatively clean, a grassy area where the water will be *contained*. Don't allow it to drain off-site via a roadside ditch, stormwater management system, or local stream.

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- Before discharging wash water to the sanitary sewer, call the Cobb County Office of Environmental Compliance to make sure it can be accepted. Certain materials are prohibited due to health and safety risks. In addition, water used to wash muddy trucks or equipment can contain high volumes of sediment that may clog sewer lines.

- Wash water that can't be discharged to the sanitary sewer should be drained the area to an enclosed holding tank. The tank's contents must be removed periodically by a licensed waste hauler. While businesses that use a holding tank incur the cost of regular pumpouts, they avoid the risk of costly environmental cleanups.

- Install an oil/water separator to remove oil and grit from runoff before routing to a holding tank or sanitary sewer.

- If you're washing relatively clean vehicles *with water only*, wash water can be diverted to a large grassy area. This will allow it to filter into the ground. *Be aware, however, that any dislodged pollutants or cleaning products that are used can also filter down to drinking water supplies.*

Alternatives to Engine Cleaning

- Avoid cleaning engines for aesthetic purposes only.
- Instead of cleaning the entire engine to locate oil leaks, try using rags and solvent to clean small portions of the engine.

GETTING HELP

Cobb County Office
of Environmental
Compliance (770) 419-6422

Cobb County
Stormwater Management ... (770) 419-6435
Water Quality Section (770) 419-6441

Community Partners
for Healthy Streams (770) 528-1482