



Keeping Our Waterways Clean

Frequently Asked Questions

What causes pollution in streams and lakes?

Some of the biggest causes of water pollution are sources that are hard to trace to a single place. When it rains, stormwater washes over streets and yards, collecting fertilizers, pesticides, oil, antifreeze, soil, pet waste, and other pollutants. They all wash into storm drains and end up polluting waterways and harming salmon and other fish and wildlife that live there.

Isn't soil "natural?" Why would it hurt water?

Soil, grass clippings and other natural debris may seem harmless, but they can clog the storm drainage system and increase the chance of flooding. Plant matter washed into waterways deprives aquatic life of oxygen as organics break down. Soil washed down storm drains clouds water, making it unsuitable for swimming. Sediment also smothers salmon eggs and damages aquatic habitat.

Are sewers and storm drains the same thing?

No. In Bellevue, they are two completely different systems. Wastewater from your sinks, showers, and toilets is discharged into the sewer system and treated before being released into Puget Sound. Stormwater entering the storm drains flows directly to streams, lakes, and wetlands.

Where do I take Household Hazardous Waste, like oil-based paint, pesticides, and cleaners?

Household hazardous waste can be disposed of at the [Factoria Transfer Station's Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off site](#) located at 13800 SE 32nd St. It is open Tuesday – Sunday, from 9am to 5pm. When shopping next time, choose safer, less hazardous products.

Do NOT put household hazardous waste in the garbage or recycling cart.

What should I do with Latex Paint?

Latex (water-based) paint is no longer considered hazardous. If you can't use it up or give it away, [dry it out](#) by mixing in kitty litter and then place it in the garbage.

Do NOT put wet latex paint in the garbage.

What's the best way to wash my car?

The most environmentally-friendly method of car washing is to go to a commercial car wash where about 60 percent of the water is recycled, and the dirty water goes to the sewer system for treatment. Car wash water is full of pollutants such as soap, oils, suspended solids, heavy metals, and other toxics. These pollutants can harm water quality for recreational activities. They can also damage fish eggs and a salmon's sense of smell, which can impact behaviors such as homing, foraging, and predator avoidance. **If you wouldn't drink it or swim in it, don't put it down storm drains!**



What goes into storm drains ends up in streams and lakes, like Chism Beach above. **Nothing but Rain Down the Storm Drain!**

Actions you can take to prevent water pollution:

- Use fertilizers and pesticides sparingly or just use compost. Practice [Natural Yard Care](#).
- Take the car to a commercial car wash.
- Sell car wash tickets for fundraisers instead of holding car washes. (See more info below.)
- Fix car oil leaks and don't overfill your gas tank.
- Scoop pet poop, bag it, and throw it in the trash.
- Make sure workers around your home don't wash equipment near storm drains.
- Use less hazardous products. Dispose of Household Hazardous Waste properly at the Factoria Transfer Station.
- Keep grass clippings, leaves, soil, and other debris away from storm drains.
- Maintain [septic systems](#) properly.
- Drain [swimming pools and spas](#) properly.
- Take extra care if you live near a [lake or stream](#).
- Volunteer! Take part in a [Stream Team](#) activity.
- Mark your neighborhood [storm drains](#). Call Utilities at 425-452-6166.



What are other options for cleaning my car?

Search the web for “waterless car wash product.” These products on the market have become very popular in places with severe drought, such as Georgia. An auto store should have several varieties that may be more commonly known for their use for detailing sports cars. All the dirt, oil, grease, and cleaning product stay on the cloths that you either hand wash in a sink or rinse out and throw in the laundry. It is slightly more expensive than a typical car wash at home, but much cheaper than the commercial car wash.

Another option for washing your car, if done infrequently, is to put the car on grass, vegetation, or gravel where the water can soak into the soil instead of running off into a storm drain. Use as little soap and water as you can. A shut-off nozzle will help prevent water waste.

Can I work on my car at home?

Yes, but take precautions to ensure no fluids from your car enter the drainage system. Similar to car washing, the preferred method would be to park the car on a gravel area where an accidental spill would be easier to contain and clean. If possible, use a spill catching pan under the area where you are working. It’s also a good idea to have materials such as absorbent pads and kitty litter on hand to contain and clean any unexpected spills.



Bordered by Lake Washington and Lake Sammamish, Bellevue has more than 70 miles of streams, 750 acres of wetlands, 3 small lakes, and numerous ponds.

Is biodegradable soap safe?

No. “Biodegradable” soap pollutes water. These products are meant to biodegrade in soil where microorganisms are present to break them down. Even if there was a soap that actually did biodegrade in water, there would still be all the dirt, oil, grease, and metals from the car washing into the nearest waterway.

What about fundraising car washes for schools, youth groups, and churches?

Selling coupons is the best way to raise money and protect local streams. Coupons can be purchased at a discounted rate from either the [Puget Sound Carwash Association](#) or [Brown Bear](#). Coupons can be sold any time of year; you won’t have to worry about bad weather. Another option is to hold the event at a service station hooked up to the sewer system or to check out a free Car Wash Kit from the City of Bellevue. Call Utilities at 425-452-6166.



Why is pet waste a problem?

Pet waste is raw sewage that contains bacteria that can wash into streams and lakes, making water unsafe to drink or swim in. Scoop up pet waste, bag it, and put it in the garbage.

Where can I get more information?

Check out [Puget Sound Starts Here](#), a regional campaign involving Bellevue and more than 300 Puget Sound organizations, supporting the message that the Sound’s pollution problems start in our own backyards.



What if I see someone polluting?

Call Bellevue Utilities 24-hour emergency number 425-452-7840 to report stormwater pollution. As a requirement of a federal permit under the Clean Water Act, Bellevue added fines to its existing escalating enforcement code provisions to stop pollutant discharges from construction, business and residential activities. The city will continue to rely on educational programs and voluntary compliance to encourage people to do the right thing. Bellevue’s goal is to protect the environment, not to penalize citizens. Fines would be a last resort.