



DEP ISSUE PROFILE

Outdoor Washing

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Background. This fact sheet provides guidance to fleet vehicle owners, civic groups, mobile carpet and equipment wash companies and others regarding the proper disposal of wastewater from outdoor washing activities. Outdoor washing activities may generate wastewater that is subject to regulation under both state and federal law. The Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Water Quality Management recommends best management practices for outdoor washing to minimize or prevent pollution from this category of discharge.

General prohibitions. A license is required from the Department for discharges of pollutants to waters of the State. 38 M.R.S.A. § 413(1). Without a license, wastewater generated by outdoor washing activities: 1) may not be directly discharged to any surface water, such as ponds, streams and wetlands; 2) may not be indirectly discharged to any surface water by way of a drainage ditch, storm drain or other conveyance; and 3) may not be discharged directly to ground water, such as through a dry well. Generally, the Department will not authorize discharges of wastewater that contains acids, bases, metal brighteners, degreasing agents or other additives that are toxic. Specifically the Department will not authorize discharges of wastewater from outdoor washing of engines, undercarriages or transmissions of new or used vehicles, or from outdoor washing of the interior of truck trailers or other large commodity carrying containers. Outdoor washing activities from mobile washing services that include toxic chemicals, detergents, soaps, and steam or heated water may not be discharged to the ground or surface waters. Disposal of wastewater generated by outdoor washing activities via a subsurface wastewater disposal system may only occur with expressed approval from the Department.

General recommendations. Wastewater from outdoor washing should be conveyed to a municipal wastewater treatment facility if practicable and authorized by the treatment facility. If a sewer is not available, wastewater from outdoor washing should be conveyed to a closed-loop, wash water recycling system if practical, or performed on impervious areas to capture solids. Runoff from certain outdoor washing activities performed on impervious areas may be directed to vegetated areas where it can infiltrate, provided this method does not cause erosion or sedimentation problems and is not located over sensitive areas, such as sand gravel aquifers. Outdoor washing activities should be performed in such a manner to avoid creating runoff toward exposed vehicle maintenance areas, chemical storage areas or other areas where contamination could occur.

Steam cleaning and pressure washing is not recommended because it is more likely to dislodge grease, oils, and other potential pollutants from the surface of equipment. The Department recommends the use of non-toxic, phosphate-free cleaners with cold water.

Generally acceptable practices. The following is a partial list of outdoor washing activities that the Department has determined do not result in discharges of pollutants that warrant a license.

- Building washing provided the activity does not dislodge paint chips. If paint chips are dislodged, they must be collected and properly disposed in accordance with applicable ordinances or regulations.
- Road, parking lot, sidewalk and other paved surface washing is allowed provided a reasonable effort is made to remove debris, dirt, trash and other pollutants prior to washing.
- Motorized equipment/small vehicle (*i.e.*, golf carts lawn mowing machines) washing provided 1) cleaning does not include engine and undercarriage washing; 2) measures to capture and properly dispose of solids, such as detached paint chips, and any other potentially hazardous materials that may wash off equipment.

Best Management Practices for Non-Profit Activities. The following best management practices are recommended for vehicle washing by non-profit, fundraising groups, such as schools, churches, civic groups, **and** scouts. Groups should also check with their municipality to see if there are any local ordinances governing outdoor washing activities.

- Groups should limit the frequency of washing to no more than once a month at a given site. Sites used by multiple non-profit groups should be used no more than once per month for the vehicle washing activity.
- Groups should speak with the local sewer district about connecting or draining to a sanitary sewer or combined sewer. The sanitary sewer is the preferred disposal option and, where possible, should be implemented only with the permission and assistance of the local sewer authority.
- If connection to the sanitary sewer is not possible, wash water from activities conducted on impervious surfaces should be directed to vegetated areas and away from storm drains and surface waters.
- Washing should be limited to the exterior of vehicles.
- The use of non-toxic, biodegradable, phosphate-free cleaners with cold water is recommended. Soaps and detergents should be used sparingly.
- Water hoses should not be allowed to flow freely. Nozzles should be attached to all hoses to provide additional pressure and decrease overall usage of water.

For More Information...

About Outside Washing Activities:

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