



Guidelines for Car Wash Fundraisers



Car washes can be a great way to raise money for your school but they can also cause environmental damage. The Seattle Public School District strives to model environmental stewardship by lessening environmental damage attributable to natural resources consumption.

There are two common ways to conduct a car wash:

“Hand Wash” with hoses and buckets or **Commercial car wash vouchers** (*preferred method*)

“Hand Wash” with Hoses and Buckets

- Schools typically run hoses from the main building to a parking area
- Buckets are filled with soap and water
- Volunteers scrub and rinse the cars
- Contaminated water goes down storm drains, into the sewer system, or into nearby grass/gravel



Washing cars by hand somewhere other than a professional car wash facility is hard on the environment. Contaminants from cars and soap mix with the water and are difficult to separate. They include things like oil, grease, heavy metals, and phosphates. In many cases, these contaminants are carried by the water right into the Puget Sound causing damage to the ecosystem. In some cases, the contaminated water is treated by a municipal sewer system before being released back into the environment. Many of the most harmful contaminants are difficult and costly to remove, and cause excessive wear on the treatment equipment. Other times, contaminated water is diverted to a grass or gravel area. Some of the contaminants are “captured” in the soil as the water percolates downward but many still make it into the ocean. The heavy metals remain in the soil.

Commercial Car Wash Vouchers

 (*preferred method*)

- Schools purchase car wash vouchers at a discounted rate
- Volunteers sell the vouchers for a profit
- Donors/patrons take their car to the commercial car wash and present their voucher
- Contaminated water is filtered and processed



Commercial car wash facilities capture contaminated waste water in underground tanks and separate pollutants before the water is reused or sent into the sewer system. They also take great care to reuse and recycle their “grey water” or already used water, which can significantly reduce the amount of water used to wash a car. According to the EPA, the average home car wash uses 500 gallons of water. A two-year study by the International Carwash Association found that commercial car washes use just 12-73 gallons of water per vehicle. That’s an 85% reduction in water use! Plus, the voucher method is not dependent on weather so a little rain won’t limit your fundraising capabilities.

For more information, visit your local commercial car wash or check out these websites:

(Note that the following websites are a sample of available resources. SPS is not responsible for the content of these sites.)

Puget Sound Car Wash Association, Charity Car Wash <http://www.charitycarwash.org>

Brown Bear Charity Car Wash <http://www.brownbear.com/charity>

*This document is available online at <http://bit.ly/sps-conservation>
(click on “Green Team” and scroll down to “Additional Resources”)*



Myths about Car Wash Fundraisers

Myth #1: I don't need a Building Permit if I'm not inside the building.

Wrong! Building Permits are required for all activities on Seattle Public School property outside of normal school hours. If you are having a car wash on the weekend or after the students are dismissed you need a Building Permit. For more information, please visit <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/propertymgmt/>

Myth #2: We use a Car Wash Kit and hose spray attachment so we don't have to worry about pollutants or wasting water.

Car wash kits work by redirecting contaminated water away from storm drains and into either the municipal sewer system or onto grass/gravel. Using a car wash kit is much better than sending the dirty water into a storm drain. However, if the dirty water is redirected to a grass/gravel area some of the contaminants are "captured" in the soil as the water percolates downward but many still make it into the ocean. The heavy metals remain in the soil. If the ground is already saturated then much of the contaminated water will run off the top and into the storm drains anyway. Redirecting the dirty water to the sewer system is better than letting it percolate through the soil. Unfortunately, many of the contaminants are difficult and costly for the municipality to remove and cause excessive wear on the equipment.

The best option is to take cars to a commercial car wash facility that separates pollutants before the water enters the sewer system. Many car washes also reuse their grey water and purchase environmentally friendly soaps. Talk to your local car wash or visit one of the links above for more information.

Myth #3: Fundraisers that use the "hand wash" method are better at encouraging team building.

There are many ways to encourage team building by using car wash vouchers. With the voucher method you can teach project management and goal setting, in addition to team building. For example, separate groups into teams and give each team a group of tickets to sell. Ask all the teams to develop a plan for selling their tickets and their target number of tickets sold. Send the teams out to sell vouchers during a set day(s) and ask them to share their successes/challenges with other teams as they go.

Some other ways to support team building: have students set up a booth and/or walk through the aisles of sports games and plays to sell vouchers; visit community events to present and sell vouchers; talk to your local commercial car wash about students selling vouchers on-site or nearby on a sunny day; have students develop their own methods of team building with vouchers!

Myth #4: The "hand wash" method is better for my car.

Many leading auto manufacturers (BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, Lexus, just to name a few) actually recommend *against* hand washing. Grit can easily become embedded in car washing sponges and rags, and is suspended in the soap bucket. The abrasive material is then rubbed all over your car's finish! Brush handles, hose nozzles, stepping stools, metal rivets on clothes and tools, and jewelry can all leave big scratches in the paint from hand washing.

Many people avoid "hand wash" fundraisers in order to protect their vehicle's paint from scratches and abrasion. Some also choose not to support "hand wash" efforts because they feel that their vehicle will not be cleaned and dried thoroughly. By selling vouchers, they can be assured that their vehicle will be professionally washed.

