

THE DIRTY TRUTH ABOUT HOME CAR WASHING

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION TO THE NATIONAL STORMWATER CONFERENCE OCTOBER 2012

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The Dirty Truth About Home Car Washing is that 127 million home car washes per annum create a toxic dump of 13.4 gigalitres of contaminated waste across Australia which enters stormwater systems which then flows untreated to streams, rivers, estuaries and other susceptible marine environments. The second truth is that while the knowledge and legislation exist to make this practice illegal, very little is done at any level of government to bring about change in any meaningful way.

The Environmental Protection Agency or equivalent in each state has promulgated legislation or regulations making the elements of car wash waste water (hydrocarbons, copper, lead, zinc surfactants and suspended solids) illegal to deposit in a place where it could flow to storm water. All of these toxic products are identified in the Australia New Zealand Environment Consultation Council (ANZECC) Guidelines 2000 for Fresh and Marine Water Quality which forms the basis for regulatory levels of toxins allowed to enter stormwater systems. Car wash waste water levels of these toxins vary between 6 and 300 times higher than the ANZECC concentration allow.

By contrast, commercial car washes are required to have a trade waste licence which ensures that these pollutants are trapped in sedimentation pits and the waste water is discharged directly to sewer, where it is treated and cleaned under EPA regulations.

A major problem is that although the EPA or equivalent provide the legislative framework, it is generally the local councils who are the enforcing authority. Local councils demonstrate little or no interest in monitoring this avenue of pollution with 35 of the 50 largest councils in the country not even dealing with the issue on their web sites and only one stating it is illegal let alone actually enforcing with fines.

During the recent drought research showed that this national figure could be reduced from 13.4 to 5.2 gigalitres by a combination of fewer car washes per year and a higher use of commercial car washes. Unfortunately water authorities after the drought encouraged home washing with all of its attendant environmental impacts.

The Australian Car Wash Association believes it is important to enforce current legislation/regulation through public education and fines to reduce the toxic effect of uncontrolled car washing on our marine and other waterway environments. The message must be either use a commercial car wash or wash your car on the lawn or other porous surface.

For more details see ACWA Stormwater Statement and Pollution Calculator