



# Environmental Rules for Car Washes

This guide summarizes the environmental requirements that apply to car washes and the actions you need to take to operate your car wash in compliance with state and federal laws. You should also ask your local environmental and health authorities about any local requirements.

This document is not a substitute for knowing the actual rules of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality or applicable federal laws and regulations. For free and confidential assistance, contact the TCEQ's Small Business and Local Government Assistance Section at 1-800-447-2827.

## What environmental rules apply to car washes?

Car-wash water contains chemicals and sediment that, if released, can contaminate drinking water supplies and block sewer lines, damage pumps, and upset the proper treatment of wastewater.

Several environmental rules apply to car washes—rules that affect how businesses manage wastes and help protect air and water. The key steps to meeting your environmental obligations are:

- Apply for required authorizations, such as an air Permit by Rule.
- Store, recycle, and dispose of all wastes to avoid spills or releases. You are responsible for the proper management of any waste from the time the waste is generated through final disposal.
- Take appropriate precautions and obtain required registrations related to any fuel tanks at your site.
- Use best management practices to ensure a clean and healthful car wash for your customers, employees and the environment.

In this guide, the environmental issues for car washes are separated into four categories:

- wash water
- grit-trap waste
- fuel tanks
- air emissions

**Self-service car washes should post signs alerting customers that dumping unwanted (waste) oil and hazardous substances into the drain or on the ground is a crime.**

## Managing Wash Water

- ◆ Filter the dirty wash water before it enters the sewer system. Catch basins and sand and grit traps can serve this purpose.
- ◆ Notify the local wastewater treatment plant, also known as a publicly owned treatment works (POTW), that you discharge car-wash water into its sewer collection system.
- ◆ Keep a copy of your letter to the POTW and any response you receive. If you call to get authorization to discharge to it, make notes about the conversation.
- ◆ Check into local plumbing ordinances. A commercial car wash must install a backflow-prevention device to protect the incoming water supply. The device must be tested annually, and maintenance reports must be kept for at least three years. It may also be necessary to have a special clean-out access for collecting samples of the wastewater.

- **Discharges to a septic system are prohibited.**
- **If a sewer line is not accessible, an alternative discharge option must be authorized by the TCEQ Water Quality Permitting team at 512-239-4671.**
- **For subsurface or underground discharges, you are also required to notify the TCEQ Underground Injection Control team at 512-239-2334.**
- **Underground disposal of fluids from vehicle repair is not allowed.**

## Managing Grit-Trap Waste

Grit-trap waste is the solid, liquid, or semisolid material that accumulates in car-wash water.

- ◆ Local plumbing codes and wastewater utilities regulate grit traps. In addition, state rules detail how you should pump, transport, and dispose of your grit-trap waste.
- ◆ Clean your grit trap regularly to prevent overflows. Do not wait until it is full. A licensed plumber can help with any clogs or problems with the grit trap itself.

### What should I do with my grit-trap waste?

There are options for managing wet grit-trap waste:

- drying the wet waste where it is created;

- drying the wet waste at another site; or
  - disposing of the wet waste.
- ◆ Use an evaporation bed to dry grit-trap waste on site. There are no regulatory specifications for the drying beds, but the design and maintenance cannot allow a release.
  - ◆ To dry it off-site, take the wet grit-trap waste to another site you own if the trip is less than 50 miles [30 TAC 330.13(h)]. Authorization from the TCEQ is not required for the drying bed, but you must register to operate as a sludge transporter by submitting Application to Register or Renew Registration as a Transporter of Municipal Sludge(s) and Similar Wastes (TCEQ Form 0481) and the Core Data Form (TCEQ Form 10400). For help understanding the requirements for sludge transporters, see *Transporting Sludge Wastes in Texas* (RG-309).
  - ◆ If you choose not to dry the grit-trap waste, use a registered sludge transporter to remove the wet grit-trap waste off your site for proper treatment and disposal (30 TAC 312, Subchapters A and G). As a waste generator, you should receive a completed copy of the transporter's manifest or trip-ticket that documents proper disposal. Keep these records for at least three years.

You may be allowed to put dry grit-trap waste in the Dumpster or take it to the landfill yourself (30 TAC 330.171). Contact the local garbage-collection service or landfill for instructions about proper disposal.

### **Who can pump my grit trap?**

A sludge transporter registered with the TCEQ may remove your wet grit-trap waste. Transporters are required to keep a copy of their registration in their trucks. Transporters may be registered to pump, remove, or haul more than one type of waste, but they are not allowed to mix types.

Costs for this service depends on the frequency and volume of waste pumped, charges for the disposal site, distance to the disposal site, testing requirements, and your choice of a transporter. The frequency of pumping depends on the size of the trap and the amount of waste generated.

For help locating a registered transporter, contact the Registration and Reporting Section at 512-239-6001 or visit the TCEQ web site at <[www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us)> and perform a site search for "sludge transport."

### **What do sludge transporters do with the waste?**

- ◆ The waste must be disposed of at an authorized site. Lab tests may be required by the landfill, and not all landfills are authorized to accept grit-trap waste. The sediment and chemicals in grit-trap waste make it a special waste (defined in 30 TAC 330.3), which

requires special handling to protect human health and the environment.

- ◆ The manifest from the transporter must include information about the disposal site. Be sure you have a copy of the manifest for your records.

**To reduce your environmental impact and the likelihood of compliance violations, keep complete records, verify that the waste was properly disposed, clean up spills immediately, and reduce the amount of waste you generate.**

## Registering Fuel Tanks

If you have a gas pump, rules apply to your petroleum storage tank (PST). All PSTs must be constructed and maintained to prevent spills. Any releases should be reported and cleaned up immediately. There may also be local restrictions so check with city officials and your local fire marshal.

- ◆ Any underground storage tank (UST) containing fuel or hazardous substances must be registered (except for farm or residential tanks with a capacity of 1,100 gallons or less) using the Underground Storage Tank Registration & Self-Certification Form (TCEQ Form 00724). The annual registration costs \$50 for each UST—even for those that are empty or unused—and requires owners to meet specific financial assurance (for example, insurance) and minimum technical standards (corrosion protection, release detection, and spill and overfill prevention and control (per 30 TAC 334).
- ◆ Any aboveground storage tank (AST) with a capacity greater than 1,100 gallons and containing fuel or hazardous substances is regulated and must be registered using the Aboveground Storage Tank Registration Form (TCEQ Form 0659). The annual registration fee is \$25 for each AST in use.

Additional information to help you determine if your tank is regulated is available in *Am I Regulated? (Should My Tank Be Registered?)* (RG-042). For help with the registration process, you may contact the TCEQ's PST Registration team at 512-239-2160. For information about other issues, such as installing or removing tanks, contact the PST technical standards team at 512-239-2182. Additional information to help you determine if your tank is regulated is available in *Am I Regulated? (Should My Tank Be Registered?)* (RG-042).

## Authorizing Air Emissions

Any activity that releases contaminants into the air may require an authorization from the TCEQ. If you operate a typical car wash, then you may meet the requirements of the *De Minimis* Rule (30 TAC 116.119) which means there is no significant contamination of the air—and no other state air authorization will be required.

If you dispense gasoline, use solvents, or repair automobiles, additional rules apply because of the potential to emit air pollutants. You may claim a Permit by Rule if you meet all the conditions of that rule and the general requirements of 30 TAC 106.4 and 106.8. Some PBRs require registration by completing the Registration and Certification for Permits by Rule (TCEQ Form 20182).

**Auto body and auto repair shops are subject to environmental rules. For more information, see <[www.sblga.info](http://www.sblga.info)>.**

## How can I run an environmentally friendly car wash?

Certain techniques may help reduce your impact on the environment. These techniques are called “best management practices,” the most effective and practical methods of preventing pollution generated by a particular type of activity. For a clean car wash, adopt the following best management practices.

In general:

- Take all reasonable precautions to design your new car wash for proper environmental management. An existing car wash may need improvements.
- Perform regular maintenance on all parts of your system. For example, a clogged drain may cause overflows and runoff.
- Handle, store, and dispose of waste in a manner that prevents it from causing a nuisance such as odor.
- Make every effort to prevent waste from reaching water. Also, prevent dirty wash water from combining with storm water.

More specifically:

- Inspect equipment, tanks, containers, and nozzles regularly for leaks or clogs. Make repairs immediately.
- Recycle and reuse wash water.
- Install low-flow nozzles or adjust flow in nozzles, sprays, and other lines to meet minimum quality requirements. Calibrate equipment regularly.
- Replace worn equipment with water-saving models.
- Replace brass or plastic nozzles with more durable stainless-steel or hard ceramic nozzles.
- Install positive shut-off valves.
- Wash towels and rags in front-loading washing machines and run fewer and fuller loads.
- Use biodegradable products instead of solvent-based or highly concentrated solutions.

- Reduce the amount of detergent you use in your system. Less detergent produces fewer suds and reduces the amount of rinse-water needed.
- Water softeners and special filtration units can lower the amount of solids in the water and reduce spotting.
- Store fuel in an AST instead of a UST.

## More questions?

Contact the TCEQ's Small Business and Local Government Assistance section. Go to <[www.sblga.info](http://www.sblga.info)> and click on "Car Washes" or call our hot line, 1-800-447-2827.

To find a publication or form mentioned in this document, visit the TCEQ's web site at <[www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us)> and click on "Forms & Publications" to search by category or number.