



Missoula City-County Health Department

**WATER QUALITY DISTRICT**

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### **Water Quality District Offers Free ‘Clean Suds’ Car Wash Kit to Keep Pollutants Out of Drinking Water, Streams**

With summer on the horizon, car wash fundraisers for school groups, nonprofits and volunteer organizations are starting to crop up across Missoula County. But what happens to the sudsy, dirty water from those car washes?

When people wash their hands in a sink or flush a toilet, the water flows to a wastewater treatment plant or septic system to be treated. Car wash water, however, flows directly into storm drains, known as “sumps,” and is not treated or cleaned. It can drain through soil and into the aquifer, the source of Missoula’s drinking water. In some places the aquifer or groundwater is only a few feet below the ground surface.

Thanks to a \$1,100 mini-grant from the Soil and Water Conservation District of Montana, the Missoula Valley Water Quality District has developed a Clean Suds Car Wash Kit, making it easy for groups to contain and divert water during their fundraisers. Local groups can borrow the kits for free by calling 406-258-4890.

“We all need clean water and often we also want clean cars,” said Todd Seib, an environmental health specialist with the Missoula Valley Water Quality District. “The problem is that during a car wash, dirty water containing detergents, motor oils, gasoline, sediment and other pollutants can find its way to our storm drains, rivers and groundwater. These pollutants can infiltrate our drinking water, and also harm fish and other animals.”

The kit works by allowing car wash organizers to cover and seal a nearby storm drain, collect the wash water there, and then pump it through a hose to a grassy area or other approved location. The kit also comes with a sandwich board sign and high-visibility vests.

Since many storm drains flow into area rivers and streams, including the Bitterroot and Clark Fork rivers and Grant and Rattlesnake creeks, diverting water from them also protects the cherished waterways Missoula County residents and visitors recreate, swim and fish in. Seib encourages local groups planning car wash fundraisers to call the water quality district about borrowing the kit so contaminated water doesn’t end up in them.

“The last thing we want to see is dirty, sudsy water running into our streams and rivers this summer,” he said.

For more information, members of the news media can contact Seib at 406-258-3109 or [tseib@missoulacounty.us](mailto:tseib@missoulacounty.us).

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