

Avoid Washing Cars on Streets and Driveways

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Washing Cars in Lake Detrimental

The Worthington Civic & Commerce association asks the co-operation of the public in discontinuing the practice of washing automobiles in Lake Okabena.

Every day, dozens of cars are driven into the lake and the accumulation of mud and grease washed off. It is the belief of heads of the association as well as local sportsmen that this practice is detrimental to the fish life in the lake as grease in considerable quantities drips or is washed from the cars into the lake water, polluting it for fish and bathers as well. In a short time a large quantity of mud is also carried into the lake, helping along the destructive agencies of wind and erosion in the process of filling up the lake bed with mud.

Anyone who doesn't realize the amount of mud and grease deposited in the lake at a single washing of a muddy car is invited to inspect the wash rack of any of the local garages after a wash job has been completed. Great quantities of mud are deposited in the drain trap and this multiplied by the dozens of cars washed in the lake results eventually in wagon loads of silt deposited in a lake bed that is already too shallow.

Civic & Commerce officers hope that the public will give this request serious consideration.

A Lesson from History

In July 1932, the Worthington Civic & Commerce Association understood that washing cars in Lake Okabena was a bad idea. The evidently widespread practice deposited mud and grease directly into the water.

While no one uses Lake Okabena as a carwash today, some of our activities involving cars, and the places we park them, still impact water quality. Due to our modern storm sewer system, washing cars on streets and driveways may have the same effect as driving into the lake.

The Peril of Impervious Surfaces

Hard surface streets and driveways are impervious - meaning water cannot penetrate them. In general, water falling on concrete or asphalt runs quickly to the nearest storm sewer catch basin. The catch basins are connected by underground pipes to a nearby lake or stream. Fertilizers, organic matter, sediment and other pollution present on impervious surfaces are efficiently carried to lakes and streams by this system.

Water Runs Downhill

If you live in Worthington, your driveway is likely an impervious surface draining by way of the streets and municipal storm sewer system to Lake Okabena, Lake Ocheda or Heron Lake. For this reason, it is important to stop



and take a look at your driveway and the surrounding landscape before engaging in potentially polluting activities.

The direction your driveway slopes will determine where the runoff and pollution go. Some driveways slope toward grassy lawns where water and pollutants are filtered and absorbed. Others slope toward alleys that may trap pollutants in gravel. A few driveways in Worthington have their own drains that connect directly to the storm sewer system or Lake Okabena. Some driveways slope in many different directions.

Did you Know?

Soap used for washing cars, and sometimes driveways themselves, contains phosphorus – the nutrient most responsible for the algae blooms in Lake Okabena and Heron Lake.

Safe Car Washing Tips

Washing your car is not harmful to lake water quality if you are smart about where and how you do it. Below are some tips for pollution prevention.

- Don't wash cars on the street. Storm sewers will carry detergents and pollution to a lake or stream. Even if wash water evaporates before it reaches a storm sewer, sediment and nutrients will be left behind to be carried by runoff during the next rain event.
- Observe how water runs off your driveway. If water flows toward the street, the soap, soil, grease and oil will go there too. Choose a different location to wash your car.
- Try washing your car on the lawn. In many cases it is possible to drive your car onto the grass without leaving tracks or harming your turf. Your lawn may even benefit from the extra water and the nutrients in the soap.
- Use safer detergents. Non-phosphate detergents are less likely to cause water quality problems.
- Pour your bucket of soapy water down the sink rather than in the driveway or street.
- Take your car to a commercial carwash. Carwashes send dirty water to the sewage treatment plant.

