

A Pullman Partnership

Not Wishy-Washy about Preventing Stormwater Pollution



Overview of the City of Pullman
Photo credit: Ryan Zimmer

Introduction

Each summer, charity car washes pop up at various locations around the cities and towns we live in. These car washes are set up with the best of intentions to raise money for many worthy causes. These events are important fundraising opportunities supported by the local community. But what happens to all that grime and sudsy water flowing across the parking lot? Could it have a negative impact on the environment? Well, yes it could! If that dirty, sudsy water flows into a storm drain, there is a good chance it flows directly into a nearby stream. All the oils, fluids, and dirt on the cars can end up degrading the stream's water quality, harming the fish and insects living there.

The situation

The city of Pullman's stormwater is regulated under the Eastern Washington Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit. Under this permit, the city is required to eliminate illicit discharges to its stormwater system to ensure only rain goes down the drain. An illicit discharge is any discharge to a stormwater system that is not composed entirely of stormwater. Technically that sudsy carwash water running into a catch basin is an illicit discharge. But no city wants to shut down a charity carwash, so Pullman sought a solution that would allow the car washes to continue without dirty water entering nearby streams.

Project goals

In the fall of 2009, the Washington Department of Ecology's (Ecology) Eastern Regional Office was soliciting water quality projects to fund through the Terry Husseman Account.



Pullman Stormwater Services Manager Rob Buchert, and O'Reilly Auto Parts' store manager, Rob Hampton
Photo credit: Pullman Stormwater Services



Contents of a Carwash Kit
Photo credit: Pullman Stormwater Services

The city of Pullman submitted an application to fund the purchase of car wash kits. These kits consist of a plastic tub to intercept water in the catch basin and a hose and submersible pump to pump the soap and grimy water into the sanitary sewer or other suitable location. These kits would be available for charities to check out from the city or would be issued to locations that regularly host charity car washes.

Ecology funded the project and the city purchased five carwash kits and initiated this new, water friendly charity car wash program by June 2010. When the city approached O'Reilly Auto Parts, one of the locations that regularly hosts charity car washes, the



business enthusiastically agreed to start using the kits. Each summer O'Reilly Auto Parts supports local fundraising efforts by hosting multiple charity carwashes. They even supply the water, biodegradable soap, and the scrub brushes to help these organizations. Now, with the addition of the carwash kit, O'Reilly and the charities can rest assured their activities are not contributing to water pollution. O'Reilly's employees even install the carwash kits into the catch basin and make sure all the connections are in place so the charity organization can focus on getting cars clean and raising money.

Milestones and outcomes

Once the Husseman funding came through, the city of Pullman purchased the carwash kits and initiated the carwash kit program in less than six months, so it was ready for use in the 2010 carwash season. During the first year, the city educated the community about the carwash program and the environmental importance of it. By summer 2011, O'Reilly Auto Parts had fully implemented the use of the carwash kit for the multiple events at their location and plan to continue its use for years to come.



Soapy water flowing into a catch basin where the pump transfers it to the sanitary sewer

Photo credit: Pullman Stormwater Services

Project highlights

When the municipal stormwater permits were first issued in Washington, there was a lot of confusion about what it meant for the future of charity car washes. Several newspapers inaccurately reported the state had banned car washing, when in reality all the permits required was education and best management practices to ensure wash water did not pass through storm sewers to local water ways. The city of Pullman, with funding from Ecology, and a partnership with O'Reilly Auto Parts was able to quickly implement a program which did just that!

Partners

- Rob Buchert, Stormwater Services Program Manager, city of Pullman
- Rob Hampton, Store Manager, O'Reilly Auto Parts
- Elaine Snouwaert, Husseman Grant Manager and Palouse Water Quality Lead, Ecology

Funding

The purchase of the carwash kits was funded by a \$2,700 grant from the Terry Husseman Account. Implementation of the carwash kit program was funded by the city of Pullman, Stormwater Services.

For more information

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