

Pollution From Surface Cleaning

It harms the environment...

In most parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, storm drains are pathways for pollution, traveling directly from streets, gutters, and other paved surfaces to local creeks or the Bay, Ocean or Delta. Wash water from surface cleaning activities often carries pollutants that can harm the numerous wildlife species that depend on healthy water ways for their survival.

...And it's against the law!

Allowing polluting substances into storm drains is prohibited in California. Both the person who discharges the pollutant or leaves it behind, and the owner of the property where the material is generated are liable.

This folder provides guidance for mobile cleaners to prevent pollution when cleaning flat surfaces such as sidewalks, plazas, building exteriors, parking areas, and drive-throughs.

This guidance is not specifically intended to be appropriate for other mobile cleaning jobs such as fleet washing and detailing, carpet cleaning, or cleaning of food-related equipment.

Where do these pollutants come from?

In general, three phases of the cleaning process can cause problems for the environment:

- **Using** harmful cleaning chemicals—including soaps as well as solvents
- **Removing** toxic materials such as oil, antifreeze, and grease from parking lots, sidewalks, or other surfaces
- **Generating** polluted wash water from activities such as wet sand blasting of buildings to remove paint

What sorts of hazardous waste can surface cleaning generate?

- Oil-saturated absorbents (but not oil-saturated rags, which can be cleaned at an industrial laundry)
- Wash water that contains lead paint chips
- Solvent cleaners