TCEQ REGULATORY GUIDANCE
Program Support and Environmental Assistance Division
RG-434 • Revised June 2026

Environmental Rules for Car Washes

Introduction

This guide summarizes the environmental requirements for owners and operators of car washes. It explains the actions you need to take to operate your car wash in compliance with state and federal laws. This document is not a substitute for the rules of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) or federal laws and regulations.

Environmental Requirements for Car Washes

Several environmental rules apply to car washes and affect how businesses manage waste and help protect air and water. In this guide, the environmental issues for car washes are separated into four categories:

- Managing wash water
- Managing grit trap waste
- Fuel tanks
- Air emissions

Managing Wash Water

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

Connecting to Water Service

TCEQ regulations require the installation of a reduced-pressure principle backflow prevention assembly to protect the incoming water supply from potential contamination hazards. A licensed backflow prevention assembly tester must perform an initial test upon installation and at least annually thereafter.[1] Keep copies of completed backflow prevention assembly test and maintenance reports.[2]

1. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-290-d
2. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/20700

TCEQ is an equal opportunity employer. The agency does not allow discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this document may be requested in alternate formats by contacting TCEQ at 512-239-0010, or 800-RELAY-TX (TDD), or by writing PO Box 13087, Austin TX 78711-3087. We authorize you to use or reproduce any original material contained in this publication—that is, any material we did not obtain from other sources. Please acknowledge TCEQ as your source. For more information on TCEQ publications, visit our website at: tceq.texas.gov/publications
How is our customer service? tceq.texas.gov/customersurvey

Check with your water provider for any additional requirements on cross-connection control.

Connecting to Sewer Service

- Call your local wastewater treatment facility for approval to discharge car wash water into their sewer system. Retain a copy of your correspondence and any replies you receive.
- Consult local city code for ordinances and plumbing codes and any additional requirements on commercial car washes.
- Install a catch basin or grit trap to filter sediment and trash from the dirty wash water before it enters the sewer system. If necessary, install a clean-out for collecting samples of the wastewater.
- Operators of self-service car washes should post signs alerting customers that dumping oil and hazardous substances into the drain or on the ground is a crime. Consider installing motion-detector cameras as a defense against illegal dumping, vandalism, and theft.

Without Access to Sewer Service

- Discharging to a septic system is prohibited. Contact the TCEQ Water Quality Permitting team at 512-239-4671 about authorizing an alternative discharge option if your car wash cannot connect to a sewer system.
- One option is to obtain a Level II authorization for the reuse of industrial reclaimed water found in 30 TAC 210, Subchapter E.[3] For more details, visit Requirements for Reclaimed Water.[4]

Managing Grit Trap Waste

Grit trap waste is the solid, liquid, or semisolid material that accumulates in car wash water. TCEQ rules detail how you should remove, transport, and dispose of your grit trap waste.

Local plumbing codes and wastewater utilities regulate grit traps. Some local ordinances require grit traps to be cleaned a minimum of once every 90 days, or more frequently, to ensure proper function and to prevent overflows. Check local city ordinances for stricter requirements. A licensed plumber can help with any clogs or problems with the grit trap itself.

Removing Waste From the Grit Trap

Only sludge transporters registered with TCEQ can legally pump and transport wet grit trap waste. To find grit trap waste transporters, contact the Sludge Transporter Registration Program at streg@tceq.texas.gov or 512-239-6413. Provide your location

3. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-210-e
4. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/reclaimed-water

and let them know you need grit trap waste transported. The frequency of pumping depends on the size of the trap and the amount of waste generated. Rules about sludge transportation are in 30 TAC 312 Subchapter G.[5]

If you choose to haul your own wet grit trap waste to a drying site yourself, you must register as a sludge transporter by submitting TCEQ Form 00481: Municipal Sludge Transporter Registration/Renewal/Update.[6] The Transporting Sludge Wastes in Texas[7] guide can help transporters understand registration, reporting, and operating requirements.

Costs for this service depend on the frequency and volume of waste pumped, charges for the disposal site, distance to the disposal site, testing requirements, and choice of transporter.

Recordkeeping

Keep a copy of the transporter's trip ticket or manifest for your records for at least five years. The trip ticket must include the following information listed in 30 TAC 312.145(a):[8]

- Name, address, telephone number, and transporter registration number of the transporter.
- Name, signature (or electronic signature), address, and telephone number of the person who generated the waste and the date collected.
- Type and amount(s) of waste collected or transported.
- Name and signature(s) of the responsible person(s) collecting, transporting, and depositing the waste.
- Date and place where the waste was deposited.
- Identification (permit or site registration number, location, and operator) of the facility where the waste was deposited.
- Name and signature (or electronic signature) of the facility on-site representative acknowledging receipt of the waste and the amount of waste received.
- Volume of the grit trap waste.

To minimize your environmental impact and avoid compliance violations, keep complete records, verify waste was properly disposed of, clean up spills immediately, and reduce waste generation.

5. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-312-g
6. www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/permitting/waste-registration/forms/sludge/00481.pdf
7. www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/permitting/waste-registration/pub/rg-309.pdf
8. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-312-g

Wet Grit Trap Waste

There are three options for managing wet grit trap waste:

- Drying the waste on-site
- Drying the waste offsite
- Disposing of the waste

Drying the Wet Grit Trap Waste

On-Site

Use an evaporation bed to dry grit trap waste on site. TCEQ does not issue construction specifications for drying beds, but their design and maintenance cannot cause a release or nuisance. Registration as a sludge transporter is not required for you to move the wet waste from the grit trap to the on-site drying bed.

Offsite

The wet grit trap waste may be dried on another site that you own if the site is within 50 miles of your car wash (30 TAC 330.13(f)).[9] Please see the removing waste from grit trap section about transporting wet waste offsite.

Dried grit trap waste must be removed from the drying site. A sludge transporter registration is not required for you to handle dry grit trap waste. You may be allowed to put it in the trash or take it to the landfill yourself. Contact the local garbage collection service or landfill for instructions about proper disposal.

Disposing of the Wet Grit Trap Waste

If you choose not to dry the grit trap waste, a registered sludge transporter must remove it from your site for proper treatment and disposal at an authorized facility. TCEQ requires all grit trap waste to be disposed of at an authorized facility which can be a processing or treatment facility, a liquid waste transfer station, or an MSW landfill. Not all landfills can accept grit trap waste; you need to call and check the landfill before trying to dispose of it. Grit trap waste is considered Special Waste as defined in 30 TAC 330.171(c).[10] Refer to Special Waste Regulations in Texas[11] for more information.

As a waste generator, you should receive a completed copy of the transporter's manifest or trip ticket that documents proper disposal. See the Recordkeeping section for more information on trip tickets.

9. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-330-a
10. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-330-d
11. www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/permitting/waste-permits/publications/rg-029.pdf

Fuel Tanks

If you store fuel on site, rules apply to your petroleum storage tank (PST). All underground storage tanks (USTs) that contain fuel or regulated substances must be registered with TCEQ. Additionally, any aboveground storage tank (AST) with a capacity greater than 1,100 gallons that contains fuel or regulated substances must be registered with the TCEQ as required in 30 TAC 334, Subchapter F.[12]

All PSTs must be constructed and maintained to prevent spills. All releases must be reported and cleaned up immediately. There may also be local restrictions, so check with city and county officials as well as your local fire marshal.

Additional information to help you determine if your tank is regulated is available at Petroleum Storage Tanks Registrations: Am I Regulated?[13] For help with the registration process, you may contact TCEQ's PST Registration team at 512-239-2160.

Authorizing Air Emissions

Any activity that releases contaminants into the air may require authorization from TCEQ. However, if you operate a typical car wash, then you may meet the requirements of the De Minimis Rule (30 TAC 116.119),[14] which means there is no significant contamination of the air and no other state air authorization will be required. If there are other activities onsite that may emit air contaminants, see our Permits by Rule (PBR) indexes.[15]

Construction of New Car Washes

Before starting construction for a new car wash, please review TCEQ's Stormwater Discharges from Construction Activities: Am I Regulated?[16] webpage to determine if your construction activities require a stormwater permit.

Reduce Potential Environmental Problems

When designing a new car wash, consider the issues described in this guide to avoid environmental problems. An existing car wash may need improvements to prevent environmental problems. Certain operating techniques can help reduce your impact on the environment. These techniques are called **best management practices (BMPs)** and are effective and practical methods of preventing pollution generated by a particular type of activity. Car wash associations may also offer BMP guidance, and operators can search for these online.

12. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-334-f
13. www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/registration/pst/Am_I_Regulated.html
14. www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/rules/30-tac-116-b
15. www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/air/permitbyrule
16. www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/stormwater/construction/TXR15_AIR.html

For a cleaner car wash, adopt BMPs such as:

- Perform regular maintenance on all parts of your system.
- Handle, store, and dispose of grit trap waste in a manner that will avoid spills or releases and prevent it from causing a nuisance such as odor.
- Cover wash bays to prevent stormwater from entering the drain.
- 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 annually.
- Install positive shut-off valves.
- Wash towels and rags in high efficiency 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.
- Consider water softeners and special filtration units that can lower the amount of solids in the water and reduce spotting.
- Store fuel in an aboveground, instead of an underground tank.
- Check with Public Water Supply for drought management requirements.

Local Regulations

Some local authorities have additional requirements and programs for commercial car washes. Check your local city and county ordinances. You can also ask your local environmental and health authorities about any local requirements.

TCEQ Office Contacts

- To contact TCEQ's Small Business and Local Government Assistance section, go to TexasEnviroHelp[17] or call our hotline at 800-447-2827.
- For information regarding TCEQ's Cross Connection Control Program, go to Cross-Connection Control and Backflow Prevention.[18]
- For information regarding construction activities over the Edwards Aquifer, go to Edwards Aquifer Protection Program.[19]

17. www.tceq.texas.gov/assistance
18. www.tceq.texas.gov/drinkingwater/cross-connection
19. www.tceq.texas.gov/permitting/eapp