WINDOW CLEANING BAY AREA

WHITE PAPER

Pressure Washing And Stormwater: Bay Area Runoff Rules For Property Managers

What the San Francisco Bay Municipal Regional Stormwater Permit requires of Bay Area cities for pressure washing and pavement cleaning, how cities enforce it on commercial sites and mobile cleaners, and the wash-water capture practices county programs recommend.

Window Cleaning Bay Area · October 2026
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Executive Summary

Water that runs off a pressure-washed sidewalk, plaza or building in the Bay Area does not go to a treatment plant. As the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program puts it, water flowing into storm drains "travels directly to local creeks and then to San Francisco Bay." That is why wash water is regulated, and why property managers should know what their cities are required to enforce.

Key Points

- **Non-Stormwater Is Prohibited:** Bay Area cities must "effectively prohibit the discharge of non-stormwater" into storm drains and watercourses. MRP A.1
- **Pressure Washing Is Named:** Cities must require BMPs that prevent polluted wash water from pavement, sidewalk and plaza cleaning and outdoor pressure washing from reaching storm drains. MRP C.2.b
- **Mobile Cleaners Are Inspected:** Each city runs a mobile business program covering power washing, with BMP standards, enforcement and inspections. MRP C.5.e
- **Capture And Proper Disposal:** County guidance: contain, collect and send wash water to the sanitary sewer (with agency approval) or haul it off-site. Clean Water Program fact sheet

Why Wash Water Is Regulated

The federal Clean Water Act regulates municipal stormwater through National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits. In the Bay Area, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board issues one Municipal Regional Stormwater NPDES Permit (MRP), Order No. R2-2022-0018, which serves as an NPDES permit under CWA section 402 and took effect July 1, 2022. MRP Findings 21

The MRP covers the cities and agencies of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, San Mateo and Solano (Fairfield, Suisun City, Vallejo) counties, organized into countywide programs such as the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program, the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program and the San Mateo Countywide Water Pollution Prevention Program. MRP cover pages

What The Municipal Regional Permit Requires

Discharge Prohibition A.1

Permittees must, within their jurisdictions, effectively prohibit the discharge of non-stormwater ("materials other than stormwater") into storm drain systems and watercourses. NPDES-permitted discharges are exempt, and Provision C.15 sets out conditionally exempted categories. MRP A.1

Pavement Washing (C.2.b)

Cities must implement and require BMPs that prevent polluted wash water and non-stormwater from reaching storm drains from pavement, sidewalk and plaza cleaning, mobile cleaning, outdoor pressure washing and washing down of trash areas. BMPs for washing outside areas of human habitation must include sanitizing procedures. The permit points to the BASMAA Mobile Surface Cleaner Program and directs cities to coordinate with sanitary sewer agencies on whether sewer disposal is available with appropriate approvals and pretreatment. MRP C.2.b

Commercial Sites And Mobile Businesses

Cities keep an inspection plan for commercial and industrial sites, with authority to require BMPs for areas such as outdoor parking areas, outdoor wash areas and waste storage areas, backed by an Enforcement Response Plan. MRP C.4 Separately, each city must run a mobile business program covering power washing, steam cleaning and graffiti removal, including minimum BMP standards, an enforcement strategy, an annual inventory, outreach and inspections. MRP C.5.e

What This Means For Owners

The permit itself is addressed to cities, but cities enforce it against the properties and businesses where discharges happen, including commercial sites and the mobile cleaners working on them. A property manager's practical exposure is that the discharge happens on the property; asking how a contractor handles wash water is part of vetting that contractor. Specific liability depends on local ordinance.

Best Management Practices

Surface	County Guidance
All Wet Cleaning	Sweep first; minimize water; avoid soap where possible ("Even biodegradable soap is harmful to the environment").
Sidewalks, Plazas, Driveways, Garages	Collect debris; dry-clean oil spots; contain and collect wash water and discharge to sanitary sewer or haul off-site.
Heavy Oil Deposits	Discharge to sanitary sewer via an oil/water separator if possible, after discussing with the site operator and wastewater agency.
Glass And Steel Buildings	Block storm drains; direct wash water to sanitary sewer or collect and haul off-site.
Possible Lead Or Mercury Paint	Block drains, collect, pump to a tank; sanitary sewer or hazardous waste disposal as required.
Graffiti Removal	Block the storm drain and collect wash water; discuss with site operator and wastewater agency.

Collection tools named in the guidance include gravel bag berms, wattles and mats to contain the area, and a wet-vac or pump to move water to a sanitary discharge point or tank. The local wastewater agency must be contacted before any sanitary sewer discharge. Clean Water Program, Tips For Surface Cleaning & Power Washing (Nov 2022)

Sources

- SF Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, Municipal Regional Stormwater NPDES Permit, Order No. R2-2022-0018 (amended by R2-2023-0019). https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/stormwater/MRP/mrp5-22/R2-2022-0018.pdf
- Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program, Tips For Surface Cleaning & Power Washing. https://cleanwaterprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Tips-for-Surface-Cleaning-Power-Washing.pdf
- U.S. EPA, NPDES Stormwater Discharges From Municipal Sources. https://www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater-discharges-municipal-sources

This paper summarizes regulations and agency guidance for general information and is not legal advice. Requirements may change and vary by city; consult the current text, your local agency and qualified professionals.

About Window Cleaning Bay Area

Window Cleaning Bay Area provides commercial window cleaning, pressure washing and solar panel cleaning across the San Francisco Bay Area. Contact: grayson@windowcleaningbayarea.com

WINDOW CLEANING BAY AREA

WHITE PAPER

Graffiti, Gum And Sidewalk Cleaning Obligations For Bay Area Businesses

San Francisco's 30-day graffiti abatement rule, California's sidewalk maintenance duty for fronting owners, and the wash water rules that apply when the frontage gets cleaned.

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Executive Summary

Graffiti, gum and grime on a storefront or sidewalk are more than a looks problem. In San Francisco, private owners have a fixed deadline to remove graffiti, and state law makes owners of lots fronting a public street responsible for keeping the adjacent sidewalk in safe condition. Cleaning that frontage then brings stormwater wash water rules into play. This paper summarizes those three layers from official sources, using San Francisco as the example.

Key Points

- **SF 30-Day Rule:** San Francisco's Graffiti Ordinance "requires that private property owners abate graffiti from their buildings within 30 days." SF Public Works
- **Where It Lives:** The details are in SF Public Works Code Article 23, Section 1300. SF Public Works
- **Sidewalk Duty:** Owners of lots fronting a public street must keep the sidewalk from endangering persons or property. Sts. & High. Code §5610
- **Wash Water:** Wash water must be contained and kept out of storm drains (see G2). Clean Water Program

Local Graffiti Ordinances (SF Example)

SF Public Works says it "will paint out graffiti on public property and notify other agencies and private property owners, so they can quickly remove it." Residents can report graffiti online, through the SF311 app or by calling 311. The department publishes a Graffiti Notice of Violation and a Graffiti Blight Notice, along with guidance on what to do if you receive one. SF Public Works

Other Bay Area cities have their own rules. Check your city's municipal code; this paper cites only San Francisco.

Sidewalk Maintenance Responsibility

Streets and Highways Code §5610 provides that owners of lots fronting a public street "shall maintain any sidewalk in such condition that the sidewalk will not endanger persons or property and maintain it in a condition which will not interfere with the public convenience." It excludes conditions created by others under a permit, who then carry a similar duty. §5610 Gum buildup and slippery grime are practical reasons businesses schedule periodic sidewalk cleaning, though the statute speaks to safe condition rather than appearance.

Wash Water Rules Apply

Pressure washing graffiti or sidewalks creates wash water. Bay Area clean water program guidance for surface cleaning tells cleaners to sweep and collect debris first, then "contain, collect and discharge any wash water to the sanitary" sewer rather than letting it reach gutters or storm drains, and to contact the local wastewater agency before discharging to the sanitary sewer. Clean Water Program G2 covers the regional permit in detail.

Response Timelines

Jurisdiction / Rule	Requirement	Source
San Francisco Graffiti Ordinance	Private owners abate graffiti within 30 days	SF Public Works; PW Code Art. 23 §1300
California (Statewide)	Fronting owners keep sidewalk safe for persons and property	Sts. & High. Code §5610
Bay Area Clean Water Programs	Contain wash water; keep it out of storm drains	Clean Water Program; MRP (G2)

Practical Steps For Businesses

- **Act Fast On Graffiti:** Track the 30-day clock from the first sighting or notice.
- **Photograph Before And After:** Keep a record if you receive a notice.
- **Ask How Wash Water Is Handled:** Ask any pressure washing contractor how it handles wash water.

Sources

- SF Public Works, Graffiti. https://www.sfpublicworks.org/services/graffiti
- Cal. Streets & Highways Code §5610. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=SHC&sectionNum=5610.
- Clean Water Program (Alameda County), Tips for Surface Cleaning. https://www.cleanwaterprogram.org
- SF Bay Regional Water Board, Municipal Regional Permit R2-2022-0018.

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WHITE PAPER

Building Exterior Cleaning Into An HOA Reserve Study

What California Civil Code §5550 requires of HOA reserve studies (a three-year inspection, annual review and a 30-year component horizon) and a framework for budgeting window cleaning and pressure washing.

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Executive Summary

California HOA boards must study their reserve needs under Civil Code §5550. The statute is about major components the association must repair, replace, restore or maintain. It does not mention window cleaning or pressure washing. This paper explains what §5550 requires and offers a framework for deciding where exterior cleaning belongs: in the operating budget, in the reserve study, or in both.

Key Points

- **Three-Year Inspection:** At least once every three years, the board must have a visual inspection of accessible major components done. Civ. Code §5550(a)
- **Threshold:** This applies if the replacement value of major components is at least half of the association's gross budget. §5550(a)
- **Annual Review:** The board must review the study, or have it reviewed, every year. §5550(a)
- **30-Year Horizon:** The study identifies major components with a remaining useful life of less than 30 years. §5550(b)(1)
- **Cleaning Is Not Named:** Whether a cleaning cost belongs in reserves is a judgment call for the board and its reserve specialist.

What Civil Code §5550 Requires

The board "shall cause to be conducted a reasonably competent and diligent visual inspection of the accessible areas of the major components that the association is obligated to repair, replace, restore, or maintain" at least once every three years, and review the study annually. §5550(a)

Required Study Contents

Element	Statute
Major Components With Under 30 Years Remaining Useful Life	§5550(b)(1)
Probable Remaining Useful Life	§5550(b)(2)
Estimated Cost Of Repair, Replacement, Restoration Or Maintenance	§5550(b)(3)
Total Annual Contribution Necessary	§5550(b)(4)
Reserve Funding Plan	§5550(b)(5)

Source: Cal. Civil Code §5550, as amended by SB 900 (effective January 1, 2025).

Components vs Operating Expenses

A reserve study covers major components and their long-term repair, replacement, restoration or maintenance. Recurring, predictable services that happen every year are commonly paid from the operating budget. Large, infrequent projects tied to a component's life cycle are the kind of items a reserve study is built to plan for.

Where Cleaning Fits

Example Item	Typical Budget Home
Routine Common-Area Window Cleaning	Operating (recurring annual service)
Routine Walkway And Entry Pressure Washing	Operating
Cleaning And Restoration Before Facade Recoating	Board and reserve specialist decide; may tie to a component
Restoration Of Glass Damaged By Rundown (See G12)	Board and reserve specialist decide

Illustrative framework only; not drawn from §5550.

Board Planning Checklist

- **Confirm The Threshold:** Check whether major component value is at least half the gross budget.
- **Calendar The Inspection:** At least once every three years.
- **Review Annually:** Put the study review on each year's agenda.
- **Budget Recurring Cleaning:** Plan the window and pressure washing cadence (see G9).
- **Ask Your Reserve Specialist:** Ask how they treat cleaning tied to coatings or glazing.

Sources

- Cal. Civil Code §5550. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=CIV&sectionNum=5550.

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