

A homeowner's guide to healthy habits for clean water





s stormwater flows over driveways, lawns, and sidewalks, it picks up debris, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants. Stormwater can flow into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland, or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the waterbodies we use for swimming, fishing, and providing drinking water. Polluted tunoff is the nation's greatest threat to clean water.

By practicing healthy household habits, homeowners can keep common pollutants like pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings, and automotive fluids off the ground and out of stormwater. Adopt these healthy household habits and help protect lakes, streams, rivers, wetlands, and coastal waters. Remember to share the habits with your neighbors!

# Healthy Household Habits for Clean Water

## **Vehicle and Garage**

Use a commercial car wash or wash your car on a lawn or other unpaved surface to minimize
the amount of dirty, soapy water flowing into the storm drain and eventually into your local
waterbody.



- Check your car, boat, motorcycle, and other machinery
  and equipment for leaks and spills. Make repairs as soon as
  possible. Clean up spilled fluids with an absorbent material
  like kitty litter or sand, and don't rinse the spills into a
  nearby storm drain. Remember to properly dispose of the
  absorbent material.
  - Recycle used oil and other automotive fluids at participating service stations. Don't dump these chemicals down the storm drain or dispose of them in your trash.

#### **Lawn and Garden**

- Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly. When use is necessary, use these chemicals in the recommended amounts. Avoid application if the forecast calls for rain; otherwise, chemicals will be washed into your local stream.
- Select native plants and grasses that are drought- and pestresistant. Native plants require less water, fertilizer, and pesticides.
- Sweep up yard debris, rather than hosing down areas. Compost or recycle yard waste when possible.
- Don't overwater your lawn. Water during the cool times of the day, and don't let water fun off into the storm drain.
- Cover piles of dirt and mulch being used in landscaping projects to prevent these pollments
  from blowing or washing off your yard and into local waterbodies. Vegetate bare spot any your
  yard to prevent soil erosion.

### **Home Repair and Improvement**

 Before beginning an outdoor project, locate the nearest storm drains and protect them from debris and other materials.

 Sweep up and properly dispose of construction debris such as concrete and mortar.

 Use hazardous substances like paints, solvents, and cleaners in the smallest amounts possible, and follow the directions on the label. Clean up spills immediately, and dispose of the waste safely. Store substances properly to avoid leaks and spills.

 Purchase and use nontoxic, biodegradable, recycled, and recyclable products whenever possible.

Clean paint brushes in a sink, not outdoors. Filter
and reuse paint thinner when using oil-based paints.
Properly dispose of excess paints through a household
hazardous waste collection program, or donate unused
paint to local organizations.

Reduce the amount of paved area and increase the amount of vegetated area in your yard. Use native plants in your landscaping to reduce the need for watering during dry periods. Consider directing downspouts away from paved surfaces onto lawns and other measures to increase infiltration and reduce polluted runoff.

#### **Pet Care**

When walking your pet, remember to pick up the waste and dispose of it properly. Flushing pet
waste is the best disposal method. Leaving pet waste on the ground increases public health risks
by allowing harmful bacteria and nutrients to wash into the storm drain and eventually into local
waterbodies.

## **Swimming Pool and Spa**

- Drain your swimming pool only when a test kit does not detect chlorine levels.
- Whenever possible, drain your pool or spa into the **sanitary** sewer system.
- Properly store pool and spa chemicals to prevent leaks and spills, preferably in a covered area to
  avoid exposure to stormwater.

## **Septic System Use and Maintenance**

- Have your septic system **inspected** by a professional at least every 3 years, and have the septic tank **pumped** as necessary (usually every 3 to 5 years).
- Care for the septic system drainfield by **not** driving or parking vehicles on it. Plant only grass over and near the drainfield to avoid damage from roots.
- Flush responsibly. Flushing household chemicals like paint, pesticides, oil, and antifreeze can
  destroy the biological treatment taking place in the system. Other items, such as diapers, paper
  towels, and cat litter, can clog the septic system and potentially damage components.

## Storm drains connect to waterbodies!



## Remember: Only rain down the drain!

For more information, visit www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater or www.epa.gov/nps



