

# Household Guide to Preventing Stormwater Pollution



## **What is Stormwater?**

Stormwater is water from rain or melting snow that doesn't soak into the ground and eventually runs off into waterways.

It flows from rooftops, over paved areas and bare soil, and through sloped lawns while picking up a variety of materials on its way. As it flows, stormwater runoff collects and transports soil, animal waste, salt, pesticides, fertilizers, oil and grease, debris and other potential pollutants.



## **What is the Problem?**

Rain and snowmelt wash pollutants (pesticides, motor oil, bacteria, nitrogen, lead, chemicals, sediments and litter) from streets, construction sites, and land into storm sewers and ditches. Eventually, the storm sewers and ditches empty the polluted stormwater directly into streams and rivers with no treatment.

This is known as *stormwater pollution*.

Polluted stormwater degrades our lakes, rivers, wetlands and other waterways. Nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen can promote the overgrowth of algae and deplete oxygen. Toxic substances from automobiles, and careless application of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers threaten water quality and can kill fish and other aquatic life. Bacteria from animal wastes and improper connections to sewerage systems can make lakes and waterways unsafe for wading, swimming and fish consumption. Eroded soil is a pollutant as well. It clouds the waterway and interferes with the habitat of fish and plant life.

According to an inventory conducted by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), approximately half of U.S. waterways classified as impaired are affected by urban/suburban and construction related sources of stormwater runoff.

## Things You Can Do To Prevent Stormwater Pollution

### General Household

Some household products, such as cleaners, insect spray and weed killers, can cause pollution if allowed to drain into a storm sewer. Buy household products labeled “nontoxic” whenever possible.

### Paint & Solvents



Clean water-based paints from rollers, pans and brushes in sinks that go into the sanitary sewer system. Use paint thinner to remove oil-based paint from brushes and rollers but do not rinse down sinks or drains.

### Automotive

Keep your autos in good repair and watch for possible leaks. Take leftover or used fluids to a household hazardous waste collection. Clean up leaks and spills with an absorbent material such as kitty litter.

### Swimming Pool and Spa

Water containing chlorine is harmful to aquatic life. Whenever possible, drain water into the sanitary sewer system. There are established guidelines on the amount of residual chlorine, acceptable pH range, coloration, filter media and acid cleaning wastes when draining into the storm sewer system, and some areas may require a permit. Check with your municipality.

### Lawn and Garden

Follow directions carefully when using pesticides and fertilizers; don't over water or use before a rain. Pesticides and fertilizers adversely impact water quality and aquatic habitat.

### Pet Care

Pick-up pet waste as soon as possible and put it in the trash. Pet waste has harmful bacteria that can get into our waterways.

