

# Stop Pointless Personal Pollution!

## *How everyday chores can harm your streams and lakes*



It's a beautiful Saturday—a perfect day to make some extra spending money washing cars for family and neighbors, gassing up and oiling the lawn mower, laying down some fertilizer on those yellow patches in the yard, walking the dog, and spraying your mom's rosebushes for pesky bugs. Work hard and maybe you can make enough money to spring for movie tickets for you *and* your date.

The health of your nearby stream is probably one of the last things on your mind as you tackle your tasks. But guess what! Each of your jobs could harm a nearby stream, lake, or wetland. How? Well, consider...

### **Washing Cars**

Many cleaning products contain phosphates and other chemicals that can make fish and other aquatic life sick. Using a hose to wash off suds creates a stream of wastewater that can travel down your driveway, into the street, and down a storm drain. No prob? Well, what do you think is at the other end of your storm drain? Usually a stream!

Here are some things you can do to clean your car, not your carp:

- Use a bucket instead of a hose to save water and limit flow.
- Wash your car in sections and rinse it quickly using a high-pressure, pistol-grip nozzle.
- Use biodegradable soaps.
- Park your car over gravel or your lawn, so wastewater doesn't flow away.

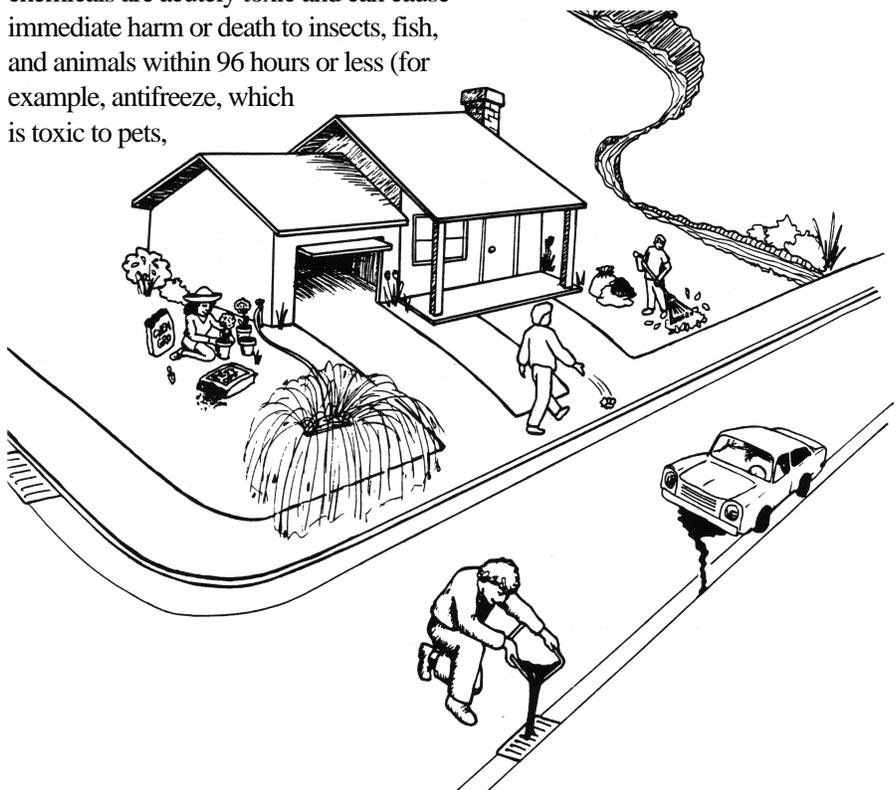
### **Working with Motors**

Motors must be maintained if you want them to work properly. Oil, gasoline, brake fluid, degreasers, and antifreeze are a few of the products you need. All of these products contain chemicals that can harm aquatic life if they get into a stream, lake, or wetland. One gallon of used oil can ruin a million gallons of fresh water—a year's supply for 50 people.

If you accidentally spill these products on the ground when you're working, clean them up quickly. If you don't, the next rainstorm will pick them up and carry them to the nearest stream. Some chemicals are acutely toxic and can cause immediate harm or death to insects, fish, and animals within 96 hours or less (for example, antifreeze, which is toxic to pets,

### **Do you know . . .**

The difference between a storm drain and a sewer? Storm drains collect water from outside our homes and businesses and carry it, untreated, directly to streams and rivers. Sewers collect water from inside homes and businesses and carry it to treatment plants, where it is cleaned before it reaches streams and rivers. So remember, only rain should go into storm drains, not trash, oil, or other pollutants.



**Can you identify the activities that contribute to pollution in your watershed? (See next page for answers)**



## Let's Go Surfing Now!

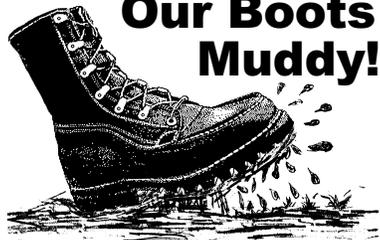
**Learn what you can do to prevent pollution in your watershed**

[www.epa.gov/owow/nps/prevent.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/prevent.html)

EPA has developed a web site on how you can help prevent pollution in your watershed. Check out the information on:

- \* Landscape and gardening
- \* Lawn care
- \* Hazardous chemicals
- \* Reducing runoff

## Let's Get Our Boots Muddy!



### Storm Drain Stenciling

Most people don't know that storm drains collect storm water runoff and diverts it directly to a stream without any treatment. Stenciling the top of a storm drain inlet with the name of the waterbody the runoff travels to helps remind people that whatever flows into the drain will end up in the stream.

Visit <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/wav/sds-rcu/sds-rcu.html> for information on how to organize a stenciling project.

has a sweet taste that cats and dogs love). Others are chronically toxic and cause harm over time.

Here are some things you can do to prevent hazardous substances from getting into natural waterways:

- Use the product only when necessary and use only the amount needed. When it comes to hazardous chemicals, more is not better.
- Clean up any spills immediately. (Wear protective clothing and gloves.)
- Never flush chemicals down the toilet or pour them onto the ground or into a storm drain.
- Dispose of used oil and other hazardous products in a safe manner. Participate in collection programs or take products to collection centers for disposal.

### Fertilizing the Lawn

Green lawns need lots of fertilizer, right? Wrong! Too much fertilizer applied at the wrong time can be very harmful to grass. It can cause disease, weeds, and poor root growth and make your lawn less able to withstand periods of heavy rain or dry weather.

In addition, the same rains that pick up oil, gas, and other hazardous chemicals can also pick up excess fertilizer lying around and carry it to a lake or stream. Instead of making grass grow in your front yard, this fertilizer can make algae and weeds grow in the water.

Here are some things you can do to keep your lawn and streams and ponds healthy:

- Use native grasses that do not have high fertilizer requirements.
- Test your soil to find out exactly what nutrients your lawn needs.
- Apply fertilizer only when it is needed, during the right season, and in proper amounts.
- Do not leave fertilizer on driveways and sidewalks where it can be picked up and washed away by runoff from the next storm.
- Do not fertilize if a heavy storm is predicted.

### Walking the Dog

Don't be embarrassed to say it—*pet poop is potential pollution*. Pet feces, whether from poodles or pachyderms, contains a lot of bacteria that can contaminate streams, lakes, and ponds. One study found that a single gram of dog feces contains 23 million fecal coliform bacteria. In addition, pet poop contains nitrogen and phosphorus, two elements that fertilize algae and other aquatic plants and make them grow out of control. And the more poop, the more bacteria, nitrogen, and phosphorus. In a densely populated watershed in Arlington, Virginia (Four Mile Run), scientists estimate that dogs deposit more than 5,000 pounds of poop each day. The solution is to scoop up after your pet and dispose of feces properly.

### Controlling Insect Pests

Pests are a pain, but getting rid of them can be a greater pain if you do it wrong. Using harsh pesticides can be harmful for people and the environment. According to the Federal Centers for Disease Control, 82 percent of Americans already have the widely used insecticide Dursban in their bodies.

A technique known as integrated pest management is usually the best approach to controlling pests and protecting waterways from pollution. Chemical insecticides are used very sparingly, if at all. The focus is on early identification of pests and natural controls such as introducing predators to feed on the pests and planting plants that are naturally resistant to pests.

## Career Corner



A *chemist* researches and develops chemicals and consumer products that are safe for the public and the environment.

An *environmental consultant* provides technical support for federal, state, and local governments, private industry, or not-for-profit organizations for developing solutions to environmental problems.

*Elected public officials* like city council members and planning commissioners develop laws and regulations to provide vital services to the community such as transportation, public safety, health care, education, utilities, and courts.

#### Answers from page 1:

1. Man dumping motor oil down the storm drain;
2. Man littering;
3. Eroding stream bank;
4. Sprinkler watering the pavement;
5. Leaking antifreeze from car;
6. Woman using fertilizers and pesticides improperly.