

## WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

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- Let your public officials know that keeping our water resources protected is important to you.
- Support BMP's (best management practices) for any land use changes in your community, especially new developments.
- Ensure that construction site soil erosion and sediment control ordinances are enforced.
- Encourage the use of properly designed stormwater retention basins or detention ponds.
- Advocate the conservative and safe use of salt on roads.
- Support wetland protection and preservation. Wetlands act as natural filters of pollutants.
- Participate in groups, projects or events that promote conservation, watershed protection, or stream/lake cleanup days.



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## Preserving Water Quality in our Lakes and Streams...

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*What can you do in your Home and Yard?*



# YOUR HOME AND YARD...WHAT CAN YOU DO?

## WATER QUALITY AND YOU...

It may not be surprising to find out that your local lake or stream has been impacted by pollution. However, what may surprise you is that a major source of pollution often starts literally in your own home and back yard! In more and more areas of Illinois, household pollution contributes significantly to pollution in local streams and lakes. The source of much household pollution is outdoor activities, and can be as diverse as yardwork, working on the car, salting your steps and driveway in winter, or walking your dog. This brochure will give you tips to minimize impacts your household may have on the stream or lake near you.

## GEOGRAPHY MAKES A DIFFERENCE....

The natural patterns of land are altered when homes are built. What once was covered with vegetation is replaced with roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and streets. Consequently, the amount of water that can soak into the soil is reduced, resulting in more water, flowing faster, running off the land and into our streams and lakes. As this runoff heads towards a stream or lake, it pick up pollutants such as nutrients from

lawn fertilizers, bacteria from animal wastes, litter and trash, sediment particles from exposed soil, etc. Because the natural barriers that once protected a stream or lake are now gone, and because the water is now flowing faster, the problems are magnified.

If you live in a community, your runoff is usually routed through a system of underground storm sewers that empty directly into a stream or lake. In this case, even if you live blocks or even miles from a lake or stream, it's essentially as if you live directly beside it. Also, because storm sewers are designed to move water from developed areas quickly during a storm, the pollutants reach the streams much faster.

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## WHAT YOU DO AROUND YOUR HOME CAN HELP OR HURT...

One of the most significant sources of pollution from homes comes from improperly applied fertilizers and pesticides. Too much or the timing of application can cause excess amounts to wash directly into streams and lakes after a rainfall. However, carefully planned landscaping and prudent lawn care practices will reduce the need for lawn chemicals and protect water quality.

Similarly, anything that drips from a motor vehicle can wash into storm sewers. Antifreeze, gasoline, and motor oil are toxic to aquatic life. Just five quarts of motor oil can create a slick the size of two football fields. Salt applied to sidewalks and driveways in the winter can also get

into our streams and lakes via the storm sewers.

Clearly, there is a need to rethink what we are doing at our homes if our streams and lakes are to be clean and usable for drinking and recreation in the future. By following the tips in this brochure, we can all work together to help minimize the impact of our home and yardcare activities on our local lakes and streams. In doing so, we at the same time, enhance our homes and communities.

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## SIMPLE TIPS FOR CLEANER STREAMS AND LAKES...

### **Around your home....**

**Use lawn and garden chemicals carefully.** Don't overapply, and consider other, more natural methods. Many Illinois soils already contain sufficient quantities of phosphorus to support healthy lawns. Conduct a soil test of your yard. If no additional phosphorus is needed, purchase only low or no-phosphorus fertilizer blends. The middle number on the fertilizer bag indicates the phosphorus content. Never apply more phosphorus than your yard needs. Your lawn won't grow any better, but the algae and weeds in your downstream stream or lake will!

**Choose appropriate types of turf grasses and groundcovers.** Consider your yards soil type, sunlight, and water conditions to minimize maintenance and fertilizer and pesticide use.

**Keep your mowing height high.** Set your mower blade at 3 inches to provide a “taller” lawn that holds water better, requires less irrigation, and helps to shade out weeds. Mow often enough to leave grass clippings on the lawn, and use a mulching mower is possible. Grass clippings actually promote healthy lawns by recycling nitrogen nutrients back to the grass. Alternately, use clippings as a mulch or compost them with leaves.

**Create buffer strips.** If you live directly along a stream or lake, grow a buffer strip of dense, native vegetation along the shoreline to filter pollutants, stabilize the shore edge, and provide important wildlife habitat.

**Seed bare soil and cover with mulch.** As soon as possible after construction, get all bare soil areas seeded as soon as possible to minimize erosion.

**Never burn yard waste along a stream or lakeshore.** The ashes are quite high in nutrients and are easily washed into water sources.

**Compost.** Use yard waste...leaves and grass clippings to create compost. Don't dump yard wastes along a stream or lake. Keep fallen leaves out of ditches or street gutters.

**Clean up after your animals.** Nutrients from animal waste increase pollution and dangerous bacteria in streams and lakes.

**Direct roof downspouts away from driveways and towards your lawn.** Use a splash block directly below your downspouts to help prevent soil erosion. If possible,

create small berms (depressions) to collect water and slowly release it to your yard or garden.

**Wash cars with a no-phosphate detergent.** Try to minimize the amount of soapy water draining into the storm sewer or directly into the stream or lake.

**If you have a septic system, inspect it annually.** Have it pumped out regularly...at a minimum of every 3 years.

**Properly dispose of hazardous materials.** Paint, oil, herbicides and other toxic materials should never be disposed of in a storm drain, drainage ditch, or stream.

**Minimize the use of road salt in your driveway or walkways.** Even better, look for other substitutes that won't harm the environment.

## **REMEMBER...YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

*For more information regarding protection of water resources, check out the following web sites:*

*[www.prairierivers.org](http://www.prairierivers.org)*

[www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

[www.ilwa.org](http://www.ilwa.org) [www.americanrivers.org](http://www.americanrivers.org)