

Five Ways to Help Preserve Clean Water

Rich Heffern | Feb. 11, 2010 NCR Today

Everyday household activities are a major contributor to polluted runoff, which is among the most serious sources of water contamination. When it rains, fertilizer from lawns, oil from driveways, paint and solvent residues from walls and decks and even waste from your pets are all washed into storm sewers or nearby lakes, rivers and streams -- the same lakes, rivers and streams we rely on for drinking, bathing, swimming and fishing. Here are some ways you can help reduce polluted runoff.

In Your Home:

- 1. Correctly dispose of hazardous household products.** Keep paints, used oil, cleaning solvents, polishes, pool chemicals, insecticides, and other hazardous household chemicals out of drains, sinks, and toilets. Many of these products contain harmful substances -- such as sodium hypochlorite, petroleum distillates, phenol and cresol, ammonia and formaldehyde -- that can end up in nearby water bodies. Contact your local sanitation, public works, or environmental health department to find out about hazardous waste collection days and sites. If a local program isn't available, request one.
- 2. Use nontoxic household products whenever possible.** Discarding toxic products correctly is important, but not buying them in the first place is better. Ask local stores to carry nontoxic products if they don't already. For examples of safe substitutes for toxic household products, check EPA's EnviroSense website.
- 3. Recycle and dispose of all trash properly.** Never flush non-degradable products -- such as disposable diapers or plastic tampon applicators -- down the toilet. They can damage the sewage treatment process and end up littering beaches and waters.
- 4. Conserve water.** Use the most efficient plumbing fixtures. A whopping 73 percent of the water you use in your home is either flushed down the toilet or washed down the shower drain. Toilet dams or bricks placed in your toilet tank can save four gallons of water per flush, or up to 13,000 gallons a year for the average family of four. Low-flow toilets and showerheads also yield major water savings. Repair drips promptly; a dripping faucet can waste 20 gallons a day, a leaking toilet 200 gallons. Sweep driveways and sidewalks instead of hosing them down.

In Your Yard:

- 5. Use natural fertilizers.** Apply natural fertilizer such as compost, manure, bone meal or peat whenever possible. Ask your local hardware and garden supply stores to stock these natural fertilizers. You can also buy a composting setup at a garden supply or hardware store, or by mail. Composting decreases the need for fertilizer and helps soil retain moisture. If you don't know how to compost, visit [The Compost Resource Page](#) or the EPA's composting pages.

These tips come from the Natural Resources Defense Council

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