

Top Ten Things We Can Do to Protect Our Watersheds

1. Always Conserve and Reuse Water Wisely

Use low-flow faucets, shower heads, reduced-flow toilet flushing equipment, and water saving appliances such as energy star dish and clothes washers. Repair leaking faucets, toilets, and pumps. Do not over-water your lawn or garden. Use slow-watering techniques such as trickle irrigation or soaker hoses when watering your lawn. As a general rule, lawns only need watering every 5 to 7 days in the summer.

Suggested Reading: *How to conserve water in your home and yard.*

<http://www.gem.msu.edu/pubs/msue/wq16p1.html>

2. Soil Test Before You Apply Fertilizers! Use Natural Systems to Limit Pesticide & Fertilizer Use

Over-fertilization is a common problem, and the excess can leach into ground water or contaminate rivers or lakes. Nutrients from fertilizer cause excess weed growth which depletes the oxygen supply for fish and aquatic insects and makes the water unusable for boating and swimming. Leave lawn clippings on your lawn so that nutrients in the clippings are recycled and less yard waste goes to disposal. Compost yard trimmings and use to naturally fertilize the lawn. Avoid using fertilizers near surface waters. Do not apply pesticides or fertilizers before or during rain due to the strong likelihood of runoff. Use slow release fertilizers on areas where the potential for water contamination is high. Dispose of excess pesticides at hazardous waste collection centers.

Suggested Reading: *Landscaping Pollution Prevention Opportunities*

<http://www.glrppr.org/hubs/subsection.cfm?hub=600&subsec=12&nav=12>

3. Use Native Vegetation and Eliminate Turf Grass

Landscaping with Michigan native wildflowers and grasses improves the environment and brings a taste of wilderness to urban, suburban, and corporate settings by attracting a variety of birds, butterflies and other animals. Once established, native plants do not need fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides or watering, thereby improving the environment and reducing maintenance costs. Select plants that have low requirements for water, fertilizers, and pesticides. Cultivate plants that discourage pests. Minimize grassed areas which require high maintenance. Use landscaping techniques such as porous walkways to increase infiltration and decrease runoff.

Suggested Reading:

Landscaping Pollution Prevention Opportunities

<http://www.glrppr.org/hubs/subsection.cfm?hub=600&subsec=12&nav=12>

4. Capture and Reuse Rainfall

Never allow roof gutters to drain directly to the street or storm sewer. Allow drainage from the roof to flow over your lawn or capture in a rain barrel for reuse.

Suggested Reading: *Rain Gardens: A How-to Manual for Homeowners.*

<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden/rgmanual.pdf>

5. Dispose of Pet Waste Properly

Clean up after your pets. Pet waste contains nutrients and pathogens that can contaminate surface water. Scoop waste up and flush it down the toilet, seal the waste in a plastic bag and throw it in the garbage, bury small quantities in your yard where it can decompose slowly, or use a pet waste compost bin.

Prevention Fact Sheet: *Pet Waste Collection*

http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/poll_3.cfm

6. Wash Your Car on the Lawn-Or Direct the Water to the Lawn

Wash your car only when necessary; use a bucket to save water. Alternatively, go to a commercial carwash that uses water efficiently and disposes of runoff properly.

Pollution Prevention Fact Sheet: *Car Washing*

http://www.stormwatercenter.net/Pollution_Prevention_Factsheets/CarWashing.htm

7. Maintain All Vehicles - Eliminate Leaks and Spills

Recycle used oil and antifreeze by taking them to service stations and other recycling centers. Never put used oil or other chemicals down storm drains or in drainage ditches. One quart of oil can contaminate up to two million gallons of drinking water.

Household and vehicle maintenance:

<http://www.stormwatercoalition.org/pdf/brochure2xvm.pdf>

8. Recycle and Dispose of Household Chemicals Properly

Many household chemicals are toxic. Buy wisely. Buy products labeled biodegradable, non-toxic, non-phosphorus, non-surfactant, or water soluble. Use non-toxic substitutes wherever possible. Soap, baking soda, vinegar, washing soda, ammonia, borax, alcohol, cornstarch, and certain food ingredients maybe used to lift out spots and stains, deodorize, polish wood or metal, disinfect, scrub, repel pests, clean pets, wash and starch clothes, and to perform other household tasks. Take unwanted household chemicals to hazardous waste collection centers; do not pour down the drain or on the ground. Use low-phosphate or phosphate-free dishwasher detergents. Use water-based products whenever possible.

Suggested Reading: *IS-55 Household Hazardous Materials - A Guide for Citizens*

<http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/IS/is55.asp>

9. Inspect and Maintain Septic Systems and Sewers

Periodic removal of solids in septic tanks will ensure long-term and cost-effective service. Improper maintenance may cause a sewage backup into the home or sewage discharge into the yard. Repair can be costly. Septic systems should be inspected every three years. Septage should be removed from all tanks and tank compartments when: the top of the sludge layer is less than 12 inches below the bottom of the outlet baffle, or the bottom of the scum layer is less than three inches above the bottom of the outlet baffle. To maintain a septic system, you should know what it is, where it is, how it works, and when it should be serviced. If you have any questions or problems, call your local health department. Their personnel will advise and help you in any way they can.

Suggested Reading: *Homeowner Septic System Checklist*

http://www.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/septic_sticker.pdf

10. Join a Watershed Organization

Participate in clean-up activities in your neighborhood. Write or call your elected representatives to inform them about your concerns and encourage legislation to protect water resources.

Suggested Reading: *Surf your Watershed*

<http://www.epa.gov/surf/>