

Remember, you're not just fertilizing your lawn...



Image Courtesy of Puget Sound Action Team, a cooperative venture between the Washington State Department of Ecology, King County and the cities of Bellevue, Seattle and Tacoma

Storm drains found in our streets and yards empty into our lakes and streams. So, when we fertilize our lawn we could also be fertilizing our lakes and streams! While fertilizer is good for our lawn, it's bad for our water. Just like in your garden, fertilizer in rivers and lakes makes plants grow. In water bodies, extra fertilizer can mean extra algae and aquatic plant growth. Too much algae harms water quality and makes canoeing, fishing and swimming unpleasant. As algae decay, they use up oxygen in the water that fish and other wildlife need.

How Can You Care for Your Yard *and* Help Keep Our Environment Clean?

You can help keep our lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, and groundwater clean by applying the following tips.

- **Sweep it.** Sweep excess fertilizer and grass clippings from pavement back onto your lawn so that they don't wash into storm drains.
- **Buy low and go slow.** First, find out if you even need fertilizer! Contact your Michigan State University Extension office to get a soil test. If you do need it, choose a fertilizer with no or low phosphorus - phosphorus causes algae growth. You can also use an organic or slow-release nitrogen fertilizer, which causes less harm to water. Follow the manufacturer's recommended amounts, and don't fertilize before a rain storm.
- **Hire smart.** Select a lawn care service that follows the practices noted above.
- **Mow high.** Keep your lawn at three inches in height. Taller grass strengthens roots and shades out weeds. Also, remember that the nutrients from grass clippings left on your lawn act as a great fertilizer.
- **Don't over water your lawn and garden.** Consider using a drip system or soaker hose instead of a sprinkler.
- **Go natural.** Use commercially available compost or make your own using garden waste. Mixing compost with your soil means your plants will need less chemical fertilizer and puts your waste to good use. And, consider using organic fertilizers and pest control methods whenever possible.
- **Make fertilizer-free zones.** Keep fertilizer at least 20 feet away from the edge of any lakes, streams, or storm drains.

In recent years sources of pollution like industrial wastes from factories have been greatly reduced. Now more than 60 percent of water pollution comes from things like excess fertilizer applications, cars leaking oil, pet waste and failing septic tanks. All these sources add up to a big pollution problem. But each of us can do small things to help clean up our water too, and that adds up to a pollution solution!

Having a clean environment is of primary importance for our health and economy. Clean waterways provide recreation, commercial opportunities, fish habitat, and add beauty to our landscape. All of us benefit from clean water - and all of us have a role in getting and keeping our lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater clean. For more easy steps on protecting our lakes and streams, visit www.mywatersheds.org.

