

# 8 Things You Can Do to Protect Your Watershed



## **1** Conserve and Reuse Water Wisely

Use low-flow faucets and shower heads, reduced-flow toilets 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 landscape.

## **2** Test Soil 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 and lakes. Nutrients from fertilizer cause excess weed growth which depletes the oxygen supply for fish and aquatic insects and makes the water unusable for recreation. Leave lawn clippings on your lawn so that clipping nutrients are recycled and less yard waste is created. Compost yard trimmings and naturally fertilize the landscape. Avoid using fertilizers near surface waters (in many cases it is also illegal). Do not apply pesticides or fertilizers before or during rain due to the likelihood of runoff. Use slow release fertilizers. Dispose of excess pesticides at hazardous waste collection centers.

### **3 Use Native Vegetation and Eliminate Turf Grass**

Landscaping with native wildflowers and grasses improves the environment and brings a taste of wilderness to urban, suburban, and corporate settings by attracting a variety of butterflies other pollinators and animals. Once established, native plants need less fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides or watering, thereby improving the environment and reducing maintenance costs. 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.

### **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 landscape or be captured in a barrel for reuse.

### **5 Dispose of Pet Waste Properly**

Clean up after your pets. Pet waste contains nutrients and pathogens that can contaminate surface water. Scoop up waste 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.

### **6 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.

### **7 Recycle and Dispose of Household Chemicals Properly**

Many household chemicals are toxic. Buy products labeled biodegradable, non-toxic, non-phosphorus, and non-surfactant. Use non-toxic substitutes wherever possible. Soap, baking soda, vinegar, ammonia, borax, alcohol, cornstarch, and certain food ingredients may be 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 pharmaceuticals and household chemicals to hazardous waste collection centers; do not pour down the drain or on the ground. Use phosphate-free dishwasher detergents. Avoid soaps and detergents with antibiotics.

### **8 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. Septic systems should be inspected every three years. 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.