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Easy Things You Can Do Every Day To Protect Our Water

A common misconception about storm sewers is that they carry water to a wastewater treatment plant. Here in Gloucester County that is not the case. Storm sewers carry storm water (rain/melting snow and pollutants) to the nearest river, lake, stream or wetland. As a result, people pollution (nonpoint source pollution) is the BIGGEST threat to our water.

One way you can protect your watershed is to reduce nonpoint source pollution. Nonpoint source pollution or "people pollution" is contamination of our watersheds, ground water, waterways and ocean that results from everyday activities such as fertilizing the lawn, walking pets, changing motor oil and littering. With each rainfall, pollutants generated by these activities are washed from the entire watershed into local waterways. They can also soak into the ground contaminating the ground water below.

Place litter in trash receptacles. Never throw litter, including cigarette butts and fast food containers, in streets or down storm drains. Recycle as much as possible.

Avoid the overuse of fertilizers. Do not apply them before a heavy rainfall. Do a soil test to see if fertilizers are necessary. Fertilizers contain nitrates and phosphates that, in abundance, cause blooms of algae that can lead to fish kills.

Use alternative to pesticides whenever possible. If you do use a pesticide, follow the label directions carefully. Many household products made to exterminate pests are also toxic to humans, animals, aquatic organisms and plants.

Pick up after your pet. Pet owners should use newspaper, bags or scoopers to pick up after their pets and dispose of wastes in the garbage or toilet, not the storm drain. Animal wastes contain bacteria and viruses that can contaminate shellfish and cause the closing of bathing beaches. Animal waste also contains nutrients that can cause algae blooms that are unsightly and can lead to fish kills.

Do not feed ducks and geese. Feeding ducks, geese and other waterfowl causes them to concentrate in small areas resulting in concentrated animal waste, causing the same problems as pet waste.

Dispose of household hazardous waste properly. Do not pour household hazardous products down any drain or toilet. Do not discard with the regular household trash. Use natural and less toxic alternatives whenever possible. Contact your County Solid Waste Management Office for information regarding household hazardous waste collection in your area. Many common household products (paint thinners, mothballs, drain and oven cleaners, to name a few) contain toxic ingredients. When improperly used or discarded, these products are a threat to public health and the environment.

Recycle all used motor oil. Do not dump used motor oil down storm drains or on the ground. Take it to a local public or private recycling center. Used motor oil contains toxic chemicals that are harmful to animals, humans and fish.

Wash your car only when necessary. Consider using a commercial car wash that recycles its wash water. Like fertilizers, many car detergents contain phosphate. If you wash your car at home, use a non-phosphate detergent.

Treat your septic system with respect. Avoid adding unnecessary grease, household hazardous products and solids to your septic system. Conserve water. Inspect your tank annually and pump it out every three to five years depending on its use. An improperly working septic system can contaminate ground water and create public health problems.

Use marine sanitation devices and pump-out facilities at marinas when boating. Observe the state's no discharge zones. Dumping boat sewage overboard introduces bacteria and viruses into the water.