What you can do as a Citizen

U.S. EPA | STORMWATER OUTREACH AT EPA NEW ENGLAND

STORMWATER *is a leading cause of poor water quality. Rain or melted snow runs down driveways, sidewalks and streets carrying oil, dirt and other pollutants into nearby waterways. Polluted runoff, which can cause erosion and flooding, runs into waterways and degrades plants, fish, shellfish and other wildlife. In water used for recreation, the runoff can lead to illness, and people who eat contaminated fish can also become sick. Untreated stormwater can also contaminate drinking water sources.*

INTRO:

Whether you live in a rural farmhouse or a 21-story apartment building, you have a role to play in reducing the amount of pollution from stormwater that runs into our rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater. The way you manage your property, your pet's waste, your garbage, or even your municipal taxes will affect the pollution from stormwater runoff. Below are some suggestions for how you, as an individual, can reduce your impact on stormwater and the environment.

TO DO YOUR PART:

Take steps in your home landscaping:

- ***Rain barrels*** — Rainwater can be collected from rooftops and used later on gardens. Rain barrels conserve water and reduce the amount of water that runs off your land.

- ***Rain gardens*** — Rain gardens planted with native plants can naturally offset the effects of stormwater runoff. Rainwater diverted to these areas from rooftops or paved areas will either be used by plants or will soak into the ground thereby recharging aquifers. Plants along roads or streams can trap stormwater pollution.

- ***Lawn care*** — Fertilizers and pesticides wash off gardens and pollute streams. Yard waste, such as leaves and grass clippings, can wash into storm drains, adding nutrients to streams. Avoid overwatering your lawn and use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly and organic mulch when possible. Compost or mulch yard waste so it doesn't go into storm drains or streams. Cover piles of dirt or mulch.

- ***Paving surfaces*** — Reduce the amount of pavement where you live. Brick walks, gravel driveways and porous concrete allow rainwater to run back into the ground to be filtered. Porous surfaces also replenish aquifers. Traditional concrete and asphalt rely on drains, pipes and other infrastructure to divert and control stormwater. The amount of non-porous surfaces is directly related to the health of rivers and lakes.

Maintain septic systems — Leaking septic systems release nutrients, bacteria and viruses into stormwater. Inspect your system every three years and pump your tank as necessary (every three to five years). Don't dispose of household hazardous waste in sinks or toilets.

Use care with your car — If you wash your car at home, avoid using excess detergents or chemicals. Wash the car in your yard so wash water containing detergents seeps into the ground rather than into storm sewers or septic systems or use commercial car washes because they treat or recycle wastewater. Also, don't clean auto parts at home. Dumping car fluids into storm drains or on a street is like dumping them into a pond or river.

Manage pet waste — Clean up after your dog in cities and make sure waste is left far from water sources in rural areas. Flushing pet waste down the toilet is the best method. Leaving pet waste on the ground or throwing it into the storm drain increases public health risks because pet waste bacteria drains into nearby waterways.

Support your municipal program — Support local efforts to manage stormwater. Support repairs or improvements to your town or city's infrastructure. Allowing your town or city's infrastructure to erode will cost more money in the long run and create more pollution. Watch for notices about street sweeping programs.

Handle household waste carefully — Recycle or properly dispose of toxic products, including pesticides, paint, solvents and used oil. Don't pour them onto the ground or into storm drains. Use green cleaning products.

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