

Home and Yard

It may not be surprising to find out that your local lake has been impacted by pollution. However, what may surprise you is that a major source of that pollution often can start literally right in your own back yard! In many areas of Illinois, household pollution contributes significantly to lake degradation. The source of much household pollution is outdoor activities and can be as diverse as yard work, working on the car, salting the steps in winter, or walking the dog. This publication will give you tips to minimize impacts your household may have on the lake near you.

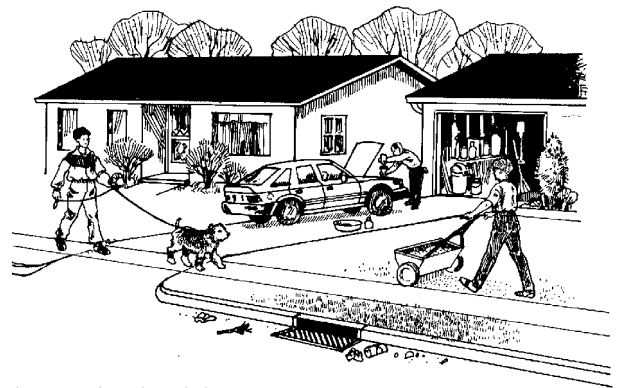
The natural patterns of land are altered when homes are built. What once was covered with vegetation is replaced with roofs, driveways, sidewalks, and streets. Consequently, the amount of water that can soak into the soil is reduced, resulting in more water running off the land and into lakes. As this runoff heads toward a lake, it picks up pollutants such as nutrients from lawn fertilizers, bacteria from pet wastes, litter, sediment particles from exposed soil... the list goes on and on.

In urbanized areas, runoff is often routed through a system of underground storm sewers that empty directly into a lake or a tributary stream. In this case, even if you live blocks away from the lake, it's essentially like you're living right along the lakeshore. Also, because most storm sewer systems are designed to quickly remove water from developed areas during a storm, this causes pollutants to reach lakes even faster.

What you do around your home can help or harm lake water quality. For example, rain can wash improperly applied fertilizers and pesticides into

lakes. On the other hand, carefully planned landscaping and prudent lawn care practices reduce the need for lawn chemicals and protect water quality.

Similarly, anything that drips from a motor vehicle can wash into storm sewers. Antifreeze, gasoline, and motor oil are toxic to aquatic life. Just five quarts of motor oil can create a slick the size of two football fields.



Looks can be deceiving. Fertilizing the lawn, working on the car, walking the dog, and other home activities might seem far removed from lake water quality. But with street gutters and storm sewers, it's as if we all live on the shoreline.

Clearly, there's a need to rethink what we're doing at home if our lakes are to be clean and usable for generations to come. By following the tips found in this publication, we can all help minimize the impact of our home and yard care activities on local lakes, and at the same time enhance our homes and communities.

Simple Tips for Cleaner Lakes

Whether you live in the city or the country... whether your home is large or small... whether you have a lot of time and money to invest in your yard or just a little there is something you can do to help improve the quality of your local lake. The following suggestions are ways that you can make a contribution to clean lakes and a healthy environment.

Around your home...

Use lawn and garden chemicals carefully and sparingly. Utilize manual, mechanical, and biological pest control methods first before chemical pesticides.

Many Illinois soils already contain sufficient quantities of phosphorus to support healthy lawns. Contact your County Extension Service agent for information on how to conduct a soil test of your lawn. If no additional phosphorus is needed, purchase only low or no-phosphorus fertilizer blends. The middle number on the fertilizer bag indicates the phosphorus content ("10-3-10" means the blend contains 10% nitrogen, 3% phosphorus, and 10% potash). Never apply more phosphorus than your lawn needs your lawn won't grow any better, but the algae and weeds in your lake will!

Choose appropriate types of turf grass and groundcovers for your site's soil, sunlight, and water conditions to minimize maintenance and fertilizer and pesticide use.

Keep your mowing height high. Set your mower blade at 3 inches to provide a "taller" lawn that holds water better, requires less irrigation, and helps shade out weeds.

Mow often enough to leave grass clippings on the lawn, and use a mulching mower if possible. Grass clippings actually promote healthy lawns by recycling nitrogen nutrients back to the grass for free! Alternatively, use clippings as a mulch or compost them with leaves.

On waterfront property, grow a "buffer strip" of dense, native vegetation along the shoreline to filter pollutants, stabilize the shore edge, and provide important wildlife habitat.

Seed bare soil and cover it with mulch as soon as possible to minimize erosion. For major construction projects and room additions, disturb no more ground than needed.

Never burn yard waste along the lakeshore. The ashes are quite high in nutrients and are easily washed into the lake.

Use yard waste on-site as mulch or compost, or dispose of it properly off-site. Don't dump yard wastes along a lake or tributary stream.

Keep fallen leaves out of the ditch or street gutter.

Clean up pet wastes to prevent nutrients and bacteria from washing into the lake.

On icy pavement, use sand or chip the ice off when possible. If using salt, apply it sparingly.

Direct roof downspouts away from driveways and foundations and toward your lawn or planting beds where the water can soak into the soil. Use a splash block directly below your downspouts to help prevent soil erosion. If erosion still occurs, attach some flexible, perforated plastic tubing to the downspout to diffuse the water flow.

Limit your overall use of toxic or hazardous products. Keep them away from drainage ditches, storm sewers, streams, and lakes.

Check for drips under your car and repair leaks immediately to keep oils off pavement. When you can, walk, bike, or take public transportation.

Properly dispose of (or better yet recycle) used motor oil and other automotive products.

Check underground fuel storage tanks for leaks. Can you smell fuel oil or gas? Can you see oil on the ground or the lake surface?

Wash cars with a no-phosphate detergent on the lawn so soapy water can't quickly drain toward the storm sewer and into your lake.

When it's time to drain your pool, let the water sit a few days without chlorine before draining. This can prevent localized chlorine contamination of your lake and other surface waters.

If you have a septic system, inspect it annually and have it pumped out regularly at a minimum every two to three years. Conserve water, and use water saving plumbing fixtures to maximize the septic system's efficiency.

Home Hot Spots for Water Quality

Around every home are areas and activities that affect lake water quality. Take a look around your home with an eye on lake water quality.

In your community...

- _ Tell public officials about the recreational, economic, and ecological value of lakes and your interest in keeping them clean, healthy, and usable.
- _ Support "best management practices" on agricultural land and construction sites in your lake's watershed.
- _ Ensure that construction site soil erosion and sedimentation control ordinances are enforced.
- _ Encourage storm water management practices that reduce runoff pollution by letting water soak into the ground or by storing it temporarily in storm water detention ponds.
- _ Advocate the conservative and safe use of salt on roads, and promote the use of sand where practical.
- _ Support wetland preservation. Wetlands protect lake water quality by acting as natural filters of pollutants. They reduce flooding, furnish fish and wildlife habitat, and provide recreation and aesthetics.
- _ Participate in groups, projects, and events that promote conservation, lake and watershed protection, and shoreline clean-ups.

