



City of Tomball

Gretchen Fagan
Mayor

George Shackelford
City Manager

CITY OF TOMBALL STORMWATER QUALITY NEWSLETTER ARTICLE NO. 1 FOR PERMIT YEAR 2014 December 2, 2014

POLLUTANTS FROM EVERYDAY CHORES CAN HARM OUR STREAMS, BAYOUS, AND LAKES

It's a beautiful Saturday—a perfect day to make some extra spending money washing cars for family and neighbors, gassing up and oiling the lawn mower, laying down some fertilizer on those yellow patches in the yard, walking the dog, and spraying your mom's rosebushes for pesky bugs. Work hard and maybe you can make enough money to spring for movie tickets for you and your date.

The health of your nearby stream is probably one of the last things on your mind as you tackle your tasks. But guess what! Each of your jobs could harm a nearby stream, lake, or wetland. How? Well, consider....

Washing Cars

Many cleaning products contain phosphates and other chemicals that can make fish and other aquatic life sick. Using a hose to wash off suds creates a stream of wastewater that can travel down your driveway, into the street, and down a storm drain. No prob? Well, what do you think is at the other end of your storm drain? Usually a stream!

You can help protect streams when you wash your car if you:

- Use a bucket instead of a hose to save water and limit flow.
- Wash your car in sections and rinse it quickly using the high pressure flow on an adjustable hose nozzle.
- Use biodegradable soaps.
- Park your car over gravel or your lawn so wastewater doesn't flow into the street and down the storm drain or ditch.

Working with Motors

Motors must be maintained if you want them to work properly. Oil, gasoline, brake fluid, degreasers, and antifreeze are a few of the products you need. All of these products contain chemicals that can harm aquatic life if they get into a stream, lake, or wetland. One gallon of used oil can ruin a million gallons of fresh water—a year's supply for 50 people.

If you accidentally spill these products on the ground when you're working, clean them up quickly. If you don't, the next rainstorm will pick them up and carry them to the nearest stream. Some chemicals are acutely toxic and can cause immediate harm or death to insects, fish, and animals within 96 hours or less (for example, antifreeze, which is toxic to pets, has a sweet taste that cats and dogs love). Others are chronically toxic and cause harm over time.

You can help prevent hazardous substances from getting into natural waterways if you:

- Use the product only when necessary and use only the amount needed. When it comes to hazardous chemicals, more is not better.
- Clean up any spills immediately. (Wear protective clothing and gloves.)
- Never flush chemicals down the toilet or pour them onto the ground or into a storm drain or ditch.

- Dispose of used oil and other hazardous products at an automobile repair shop or gas station with a used oil collection service. Participate in collection programs or take products to collection centers for disposal.

Fertilizing the Lawn

Green lawns need lots of fertilizer, right? Wrong! Too much fertilizer applied at the wrong time can be very harmful to grass. It can cause disease, weeds, and poor root growth and make your lawn less able to withstand periods of heavy rain or dry weather.

In addition, the same rains that pick up oil, gas, and other hazardous chemicals can also pick up excess fertilizer lying around and carry it to a lake or stream. Instead of making grass grow in your front yard, this fertilizer can make algae and weeds grow in the water. You can have a nice-looking lawn and still keep streams and ponds healthy if you:

- Use native grasses that do not have high fertilizer requirements.
- Test your soil to find out exactly what nutrients your lawn needs.
- Apply fertilizer only when it is needed, during the right season, and in proper amounts.
- Do not leave fertilizer on driveways and sidewalks where it can be picked up and washed away by runoff from the next storm.
- Do not fertilize if a heavy storm is predicted.

Walking the Dog

Don't be embarrassed to say it—pet poop is potential pollution. Pet feces contain a lot of bacteria that can contaminate streams, lakes, and ponds. One study found that a single gram of dog feces contains 23 million bacteria cells. In another study scientists estimate that dogs deposit more than 5,000 pounds of poop each day in one community! You can help reduce the amount of pet waste entering local streams if you pick up after your pet and throw the poop in the trash can.

Controlling Insect Pests

Pests are a pain, but getting rid of them can be a greater pain if you do it wrong. Using harsh pesticides can be harmful for people and the environment. According to the Federal Centers for Disease Control, 82 percent of Americans already have the widely used insecticide Dursban in their bodies.

A technique known as *integrated pest management* is usually the best approach to controlling pests and protecting waterways from pollution see www.epa.gov/pesticides/controlling. Chemical insecticides are used very sparingly, if at all. The focus is on early identification of pests and natural controls such as introducing predators to feed on the pests and planting plants that are naturally resistant to pests. You can reduce the use of pesticides at your house if you learn about *integrated pest management* and practice it.

For more information about the City of Tomball's stormwater quality management program or report stormwater pollution concerns contact Michael Bloom at 281-921-8784 or via email at mbloom@rgmiller.com.

Adapted from U.S. EPA's "Stop Pointless Personal Pollution!"