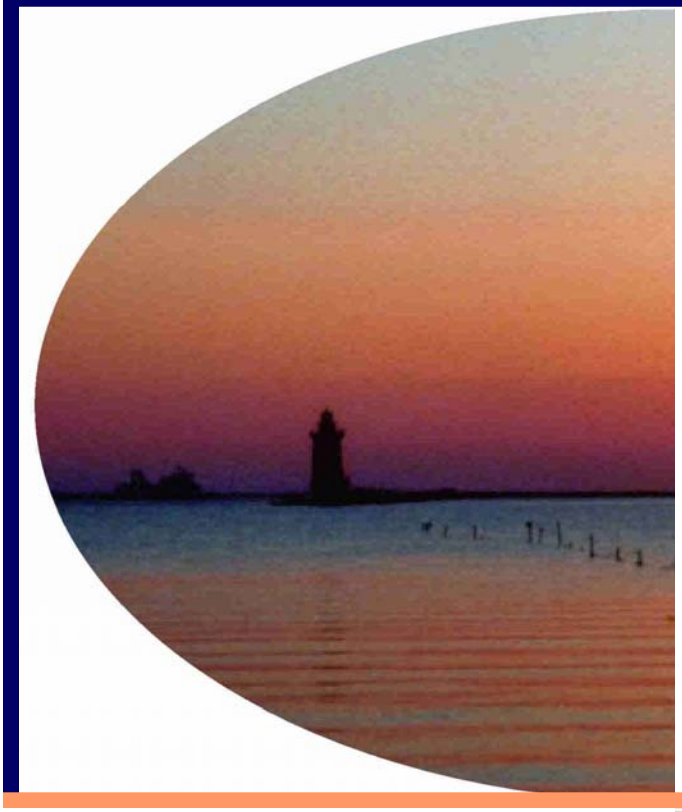
POLLUTED STORMWATER RUNOFF

Factsheet for Gardeners and Homeowners



After it rains, water flows off our yards, streets, parking lots, and driveways into the storm drains, and eventually into our streams, lakes, and bays. Unfortunately, this runoff picks up pollutants that flow directly into our local waterways. These pollutants can include soil, motor oil, pesticides, fertilizers, pet waste, and litter. Many people mistakenly think that the water entering from our storm drains is cleaned or treated in some way. On the contrary, our storm drain systems channel water directly into our creeks. If our runoff water and stormwater is contaminated, it can become a major source of water pollution. This factsheet series is broken into seven different user groups who can help prevent stormwater from becoming polluted.

Builders/Developers

Gardeners/Homeowners

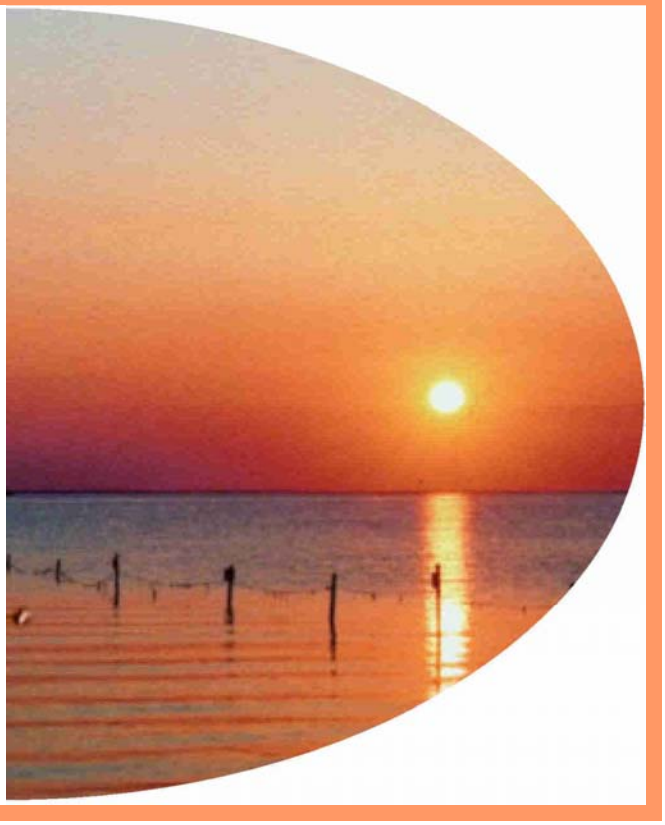
Automotive Businesses

Restaurants

Car Owners

Pet Owners

Pool Owners



FACTSHEET FOR GARDNERS AND HOMEOWNERS

Polluted Stormwater Runoff

Urban runoff is the water that flows off our yards, streets, parking lots, and driveways, and into our storm drains, eventually finding its way into our creeks, streams, and bays. Whether it is from sprinklers, car washing, or hosing down the driveway, everyone is a potential contributor to urban runoff. For example, normal landscape and garden maintenance activities can be major contributors to storm drain pollution. Soils, yard waste, over-watering, and garden chemicals become part of the urban runoff mixture that ends up in the storm drains before entering our creeks and other waterways.

Nutrients from fertilizers, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, promote algae blooms and excessive plant growth. Algae depletes oxygen in water, making it unavailable to fish and other aquatic life. Be sure not to over-fertilize lawns. First, get your soil tested by obtaining a soil sample. This will tell you exactly what your lawn needs. Do not fertilize lawns if rain is predicted.

Pesticides and herbicides don't just kill garden pests. They also harm beneficial insects, aquatic plants, and fish that live in our waterways. Avoid over-applying chemicals to your lawn or garden, especially when rain is expected.

Yard waste such as leaves and grass are also pollutants to our waterways. Never place this type of debris in the stormwater system or stormwater pond. During decomposition, they absorb oxygen that is needed by fish and other aquatic animals. Sweep excess lawn clippings, leaves, and other yard waste into a bin.

Sediment clogs the gills of fish and blocks sunlight needed for photosynthesis. Photosynthesis occurs in plants and phytoplankton and produces the oxygen in water needed by aquatic organisms. Soil erosion can be prevented by planting grass and other rapidly growing vegetation that will hold the dirt particles together.

Overwatering not only wastes water, but it also contributes to stormwater runoff. More water is then available to transport sediment, nutrients, and pesticides into our waterways. Apply only the amount of water that the plant needs.

Talk to Your Yard Care Service

If you use a professional yard care service, it is still up to you to make sure that your landscaper does not contribute to the stormwater pollution problem. Here are some things to consider when choosing a service.

1. Make sure that they use integrated pest management (IPM) methods. This approach is a safer, long-term solution to weed and insect problems. It is based on supplementing physical controls, such as having healthy soils, with chemical applications.
2. Ask them to grasscycle (leave the clippings on the lawn). Grasscycling reduces thatch, improves the soil, and reduces fertilizer requirements. Regularly, have them check that sprinklers are functioning properly.
3. Make sure they sweep up clippings on driveways and dispose of them properly, rather than blowing them onto the street.
4. Discuss pest management. If you decide to use pesticides, know which ones are being used. Make sure that they are being used only when necessary and not on a set schedule. You should also be notified whenever they are being applied for safety reasons for you, your children, and your pets.
5. Know how often fertilizers are used. Even professionals over-fertilize.