

## How You Can Prevent Storm Water Runoff Pollution

Information targeting water quality issues from the Phase II Storm Water Management Communication Committee.

### Marketing Season: All

#### What is storm water runoff?

Storm water runoff occurs when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over the ground. Impervious surfaces like driveways, sidewalks, and streets prevent storm water from naturally soaking into the ground. Storm water can pick up debris, chemicals, dirt and other pollutants and flow into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the water bodies we use for swimming, fishing and providing drinking water.

Polluted storm water runoff can have many adverse effects on plants, fish, animals and people.

- Sediment can cloud the water and make it difficult or impossible for aquatic plants to grow. Sediment also can destroy aquatic habitats.
- Excess nutrients can cause algae blooms. When algae die, they sink to the bottom and decompose in a process that removes oxygen from the water. Fish and other aquatic organisms can't exist in water with low dissolved oxygen levels.
- Bacteria and other pathogens can wash into swimming areas and create health hazards, often making beach closures necessary.
- Debris – plastic bags, six pack rings, bottles and cigarette butts – washed into water bodies can choke, suffocate, or disable aquatic life like ducks, fish, turtles and birds.
- Household hazardous wastes like insecticides, pesticides, paint, solvents, used motor oil, and other auto fluids can poison aquatic life. Land animals and people can become sick or die from eating diseased fish and shellfish or ingesting polluted water.
- Polluted storm water often affects drinking water sources. This, in turn, can affect human health and increase drinking water treatment costs.

#### **Ten Things You Can Do To Prevent Storm Water Runoff Pollution:**

- ✓ Use fertilizers sparingly and sweep up driveways, sidewalks and gutters.
- ✓ Never dump anything down storm drains or in streams
- ✓ Vegetate bare spots in your yard
- ✓ Compost your yard waste
- ✓ Use least toxic pesticides, follow labels, and learn how to prevent pest problems
- ✓ Direct downspouts away from paved surfaces; consider a rain garden to capture runoff
- ✓ Take your car to the car wash instead of washing it in the driveway
- ✓ Check your car for leaks and recycle your motor oil
- ✓ Pick up after your pet
- ✓ Have your septic tank pumped and system inspected regularly