

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Five easy things you can do to improve Minnesota's lakes and streams**

The quality of lakes, streams and wetlands in Minnesota is threatened by increasing pollution. When it rains, the stormwater that runs off driveways, lawns, houses and parking lots can carry pollutants like oil, paint and chemicals down storm sewers and into nearby lakes, streams and rivers. By taking the following easy, no-cost or low-cost steps, you can have a big impact on reducing runoff and protecting our water resources and wildlife habitat.

**1. Fertilize smart.** Be sure your fertilizer is phosphorus-free. Soils in our area already contain enough phosphorus to maintain most lawns. Sweep up any fertilizer that spills onto hard surfaces. Excess fertilizer washes away into nearby lakes or streams where it can feed algae. Algae blooms stress fish and wildlife and make it unpleasant or impossible to swim or fish.

**2. Grass – Don't blow it off.** Don't blow or rake grass clippings and leaves into the street. Leave them on your lawn, use them for compost or bag them up. Grass clippings and leaves in the street end up in the storm sewer where they are carried to nearby lakes and streams. Clippings and leaves contain phosphorus and other nutrients that, like fertilizer, feed algae and other aquatic plants.

**3. Use your runoff.** Direct your downspouts onto your lawn or garden or into a rain barrel. Rainwater is free, naturally soft and perfect for keeping your green things growing. Using rainwater to water your lawn and garden reduces runoff, which carries pollutants to lakes and streams.

**4. Scoop the poop.** Grab a bag when you grab the leash and pick up after your pets. When pet waste is left behind, rainwater washes it into lakes and streams. Pet waste contains bacteria that can cause illness. It also contains nutrients that can cause excessive algae blooms in lakes and streams.

**5. Use chemicals wisely.** Read the label before using herbicides and pesticides and apply according to directions. Use the minimum amount needed to control the problem. If you can, consider using alternative or natural remedies to control weeds and pests, or remove the problem by hand.

For more information on these and other actions you can take to protect water quality, visit [www.hennepin.us/water](http://www.hennepin.us/water).

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**Editor's Note**

This sample newsletter article was provided by Hennepin County as a part of a coordinated education campaign with the county's watershed organizations. If you have any questions about the campaign, please contact Angie Timmons at 612-348-2477. Published May 2009.