

# Seven Simple Steps to Clean Water

## 1. Help keep pollution out of storm drains

Storm drains lead to our lakes and streams. So, any oil, pet waste, leaves, or dirty water from washing your car that enters a storm drain gets into our lakes and streams. With almost 5 million people living in Southeast Michigan, we all need to be aware of what goes in our storm drains. **Remember, only rain in the drain!**

## 2. Fertilize sparingly and carefully

Storm drains in our streets and yards empty into our lakes and streams. So, when we fertilize our lawn we could also be fertilizing our lakes and streams. While fertilizer is good for our lawn, it's bad for our water. Fertilizer in our lakes and streams causes algae to grow. Algae can form large blooms and use oxygen that fish need to survive. With 1.5 million homes in Southeast Michigan, all of us need to be aware of the cumulative effects of our lawn care practices.

What can you do? Simple. **Use fertilizer low in phosphorus**, select a slow-release fertilizer where at least half of the nitrogen is "water insoluble" (check the ingredients on the label), keep fertilizer away from lakes, streams, and storm drains, and **sweep excess fertilizer** back onto your lawn.

## 3. Carefully store and dispose of household cleaners, chemicals, and oil

Antifreeze, household cleaners, gasoline, pesticides, oil paints, solvents, and motor oil are just some of the common household products that enter our storm drains. You can help keep these out of our lakes and streams . . . instead of putting these items in the trash, down the storm drain, or on the ground, **take them to a local hazardous waste center or collection day.**

## 4. Clean up after your pet

Most of us pick up after our pets to be a good neighbor and keep our yard clean. But there's another important reason. Pet waste contains bacteria that is harmful to us and our water. Leaving it on the sidewalk or lawn means harmful bacteria will be transported into the storm drains and then into our lakes and streams. So what can you do to help? Simple. Whether on a walk or in your yard, **dispose of your pet's waste promptly in the toilet or trash.**

## 5. Practice good car care

Did you know that just four quarts of oil from your car's engine can form an eight-acre oil slick if spilled or dumped down a storm drain? There are over 4 million cars in Southeast Michigan, so even small leaks matter. **Keep your car tuned and fix leaks promptly.** Not only will this make your car run better and last longer, it will be good for our lakes, streams, and air. When washing your car, keep the polluted water from going into the street and storm drain. **Consider taking your car to the car wash or washing your car on the grass.** Your lawn will gladly soak up the excess water.

## 6. Choose earth-friendly landscaping

When landscaping your yard you can protect your kids, pets, and the environment from harm. **Use pesticides sparingly.** Put mulch around trees and plants. Water your lawn only when it needs it (1-2 times a week is usually sufficient) and **choose plants native to Michigan.** Once established, these plants tolerate dry weather and resist disease.

## 7. Save water

Did you know that individually we use about 77 gallons of water each day? When we overwater our lawns, it can easily carry pollution to the storm drains and to our lakes and streams. **Consider using a broom instead of a hose** to clean sidewalks and driveways. Direct hoses and sprinklers on the lawn, not the driveway. Water when necessary instead of on a fixed schedule. Remember, saving water also saves you money.

We might not be able to see the lake or stream from our window, but it's there. It might be a small stream or ditch or even the storm drain in the street. All of these lead to our lakes and streams. So, what we do at home affects our rivers and lakes!



The Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water formed to engage the public in activities that protect our water resources through continued awareness, knowledge, and action. The partnership includes representatives from SEMCOG, various counties, communities, watershed councils, and water-quality professionals in Southeast Michigan.

**Our Water. Our Future.**



Find out more at [www.semco.org](http://www.semco.org)

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