

# What You Can Do

There are lots of ways that each of us can contribute to the improvement of Delaware's Chesapeake Basin. This list includes only a few of them. The future of this environmental treasure – and the health of future generations – rests with each of us. Get involved!

## Car Care

Activities such as washing the car, washing down the driveway, or draining the car's fluids can send detergents and harmful chemicals into your local storm drain and local waterway. Liquids that enter a storm drain are not treated, but go directly into a water supply, carrying with it chemicals that can pollute the water causing fish kills and human illnesses.

Wash the car on grass so that water and detergents are filtered through the grass before entering the watershed. Also, use an automatic shut-off nozzle to reduce water usage and runoff from your hose. Motor oil, anti-freeze, battery acid, brake fluid, gasoline, car wax, and rust preventatives harm the Chesapeake Bay when they flow into storm drains or off paved surfaces into a waterway, so check for leaks and contain these fluids when you change them. To discard these materials, contact your local service station about their recycling programs or call (DE) 1-800-662-8802 or (MD) 1-800-492-9188 for more information about safe disposal of chemicals.

## Lawn Care

Pesticides, fertilizer, and eroded soil can make their way into storm drains and local waterways. Since storm drain matter is not treated, this means that harmful lawn runoff can pollute local waters causing algae blooms, fish kills, human illnesses, and restrictions on water recreation.

Limit your use of fertilizers to only what is absolutely necessary. Most lawns are over-fertilized, so perform a soil test every 3-4 years to determine the lawn's nutrient needs, and use phosphorus-free fertilizer. Call your local soil conservation district for more information about soil testing.



Lawns with trees and shrubs prevent erosion, soak up polluting fertilizer and pesticides before they run into streams, and improve soil quality by adding organic material. Test your soil and plant the right grasses and plants for your region. Compost leaves and lawn clippings to use as mulch or use a "mulching mower" and reduce the need for fertilizer. Also, remember that cutting the lawn too short weakens the grass and increases the likelihood of weeds.

Try to reduce the use of pesticides and if pesticides are used, try to use a natural (non-toxic) alternative. Follow the directions carefully on all pesticide labels and avoid applying when rain is in the forecast. A better way to eliminate harmful bugs is to encourage helpful bugs, birds, and animals in your yard.

Firewood attracts termites, so make sure it's stored away from your home. Remove water from old tires to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

## Home Care

Household chemical products, septic systems, and erosion can result in harmful chemicals and sediment making their way into storm drains and local waterways causing algae blooms, fish kills, human illnesses, and contaminated swimming areas, drinking water, and food.

Maintain your septic system. Inspections and pump-outs are an important part of septic system ownership. The Center for Watershed Protection

reminds homeowners that "the cost of regular inspection and pump-outs every three years (\$100-\$250) is far cheaper than the estimated \$2,000-\$8,000 it may cost to replace a malfunctioning system. Even those with relatively new homes need to be informed that the relative age of a system does not guarantee its proper function, and that an improperly installed system can fail within three to five years."

If a septic system fails, its untreated waste seeps into streams, rivers, ground water, and the Bay. Your system is not working properly if drains and toilets drain slowly or if effluent seeps upward from the ground. Never use your toilet as a garbage can. Use your garbage disposal sparingly to reduce grease and solids in your septic system. Know the location of your septic system and keep heavy equipment off the drainage area to prevent compacting and clogging.

Many household products like paints, preservatives, brush cleaners, and solvents can harm the Chesapeake Bay. Never pour them down the drain since sewers and septic tanks do not treat these materials. Buy products with the least amount of toxic material. Stuff empty paint cans and other chemical containers with newspaper and refer to a household hazardous waste chart for proper dis-



posal. Call your local wastewater treatment facility or the Water Environment Federation at 703-684-2400 for guidance.

When rain falls on hard surfaces such as walkways, patios, and driveways, it enters storm drains and ditches and finds its way into the Chesapeake Bay. This water carries with it elements that may be harmful to the river. You can slow run-off by reducing the amount of hard surfaces around your home. Wood decks with space between the boards allow water to drain into the ground. Brick or interlocking stone walkways also permit water to seep into the soil. Diverting rain from paved surfaces and roofs onto grass also reduces run-off into storm drains. Planting trees can help keep streams and the Chesapeake Bay free of nutrients and sediment and improve water quality. They can also reduce non-point source pollution, which is runoff and erosion from no single point of origin. Put a rain barrel under your rainspout to reduce runoff created by hard rains, and use that water in your garden.

If possible, purchase non-phosphate laundry detergents and non-toxic cleaning products; choose latex paint rather than oil-based paint; and use fabric softener sheets rather than liquids.

Finally, saving water helps the Chesapeake by reducing the volume of water going through sewage treatment plants. It also can save you money. In one day, a dripping faucet wastes 20 gallons of water and a leaking toilet wastes 200 gallons. Use water sparingly while brushing your teeth, washing dishes, or shaving. Install a water conservation showerhead and take short showers instead of baths.

## Pet Care

Pet waste can be detrimental to water quality because it can introduce harmful nutrients and bacteria into storm drains and local waterways causing algae blooms, fish kills, human illnesses, and contaminated swimming areas, drinking water, and food. The Center for Watershed Protection reports that approximately 40% of Chesapeake Bay area residents own a dog, so cleaning up after pets is vital to keeping the Chesapeake Bay healthy and safe. Take along a plastic bag when walking the dog and help keep bacteria out of the Bay.