

# FACT SHEET

## THINGS YOU CAN DO EVERY DAY TO HELP PROTECT WATER QUALITY

In the Grand Traverse Bay watershed the everyday habits of residents and visitors are having an impact on the health of our waters. Protecting the sparkling waters that we all enjoy is a group effort. You are probably already doing many things to help protect the water quality and just don't know it. Check out the list below and see how you are doing.

To have an even greater impact, start small by picking two or three things you know you can do and make a commitment. Small actions can add up to big results. *Any one of us can make a difference!*

### Keeping Storm Drains Clean:

Most of the stormdrains you see in towns and cities throughout northern Michigan drain directly to a body of water, either a river, lake, or nearby stream. More often than not, this stormwater is not treated before reaching the body of water. Anything that gets dumped or washed down these stormdrains will find its way into the nearest body of water and eventually wind up in Grand Traverse Bay.

- Pick up litter and debris before it gets into storm drains and gutters.
- Don't dump motor oil or other wastes into the storm drains; dispose of them properly at hazardous waste events or a disposal center.
- Use de-icers (like salt) sparingly during winter months.
- Clean up pet waste and dispose of it in the trash.
- Wash your car on your lawn or a gravel pad; soaps contain phosphorus which, when rinsed into a body of water, can increase nutrient input. Read labels and purchase low or no phosphate detergents

### Around The House:

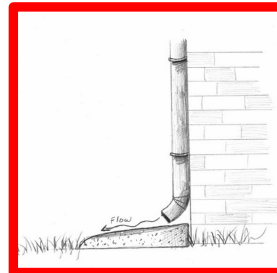
- Dispose of excess household chemicals and paints at a hazardous waste pickup event or a disposal center.
- Use environmentally-friendly cleaning products where possible.
- Do your part to conserve water while brushing your teeth, doing dishes, showering, etc.
- Use low-flow showerheads.
- If you are on a septic system, maintain it regularly. (See *Maintaining Your Septic System Fact Sheet*)
- Use latex paint instead of oil-based paint where appropriate. Allow excess to evaporate before throwing the can away.
- And finally...  
...Recycle!



This information has been compiled by:  
The Watershed Center  
Grand Traverse Bay  
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### In The Yard:

- If you live along a stream or lake, plant a natural, vegetative buffer strip along the shore or streambank to prevent erosion and runoff into the water. Also called riparian buffers, filter strips, or greenbelts, they are widely considered one of the best ways to control and reduce the amount of pollution entering a water body.
- Landscape with native species and reduce the size of your lawn to avoid having to use too much fertilizer or water.
- Test your soil – take a sample to your MSU Cooperative Extension Office and have it tested for nutrients to let you know how the amount of fertilizer your lawn actually needs.
- Use lawn fertilizer and pesticides carefully and sparingly.
- Mow high (leave 2.5 to 3.0 inches to allow for a deep, healthy root system) and mow frequently (to keep the plants strong).
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn and use a mulching mower. Lawn clippings rapidly decompose and contribute the equivalent of ½ to 1 pound of nitrogen/1,000 square feet per year, so you don't have to use as much fertilizer on your lawn.
- Avoid spreading lawn chemicals on sidewalks or driveways where they can wash into a water body or storm drain.
- If you live on a lake or stream, don't dump your grass clippings or fall leaves in the water. Instead, rake yard waste and place it into a compost pile. Use mulch around plants and shrubs to reduce water consumption and help prevent erosion and runoff.
- Redirect runoff from impervious surfaces around your yard. *See pictures at right*



### On The Water:

- Dispose of garbage and other waste properly – onshore, not overboard.
- Keep your bilge clean with an absorbent sponge or pad.
- Inspect your boat and trailer for plant debris and zebra mussels and remove once you get to shore.
- Be careful about taking baitfish from one lake to the other, you may be spreading invasive species!
- Help protect vital plant and animal life by respecting no-wake zones.
- Remember that the lake is not a bathtub... direct input of soaps and shampoos is harmful to lakes and streams.

### In The Watershed

- Volunteer for The Watershed Center's **Stream Search** volunteer monitoring program held every Spring and Fall.
- Organize or join a beach, stream or river cleanup.
- Organize a storm drain stenciling project in your neighborhood. We'll help you with supplies.

*Volunteers at the  
June 2003 Stream Search Event*



### Other Suggestions:

- Fix the leaks in your car – oil, antifreeze and other fluids that leak from your car end up in the water when it rains.
- Use alkaline rechargeable or low-mercury batteries.
- Drive your car less – auto emissions are a huge source of greenhouse gases. Greenhouse gases alter our climate and are believed to be a factor in lower water levels in the Great Lakes. Try walking or biking to wherever you need to go.
- Conserve electricity and reduce the demand for electric power. Power plant emissions include greenhouse gases, mercury and sulfur (which causes acid rain).

*Bikers on the TART Trail in Traverse City.  
Photo courtesy of TART Trails, Inc. and  
John Robert Williams*



For more information on how you can get involved in protecting water quality in our region, contact The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay, 232 E. Front Street, Traverse City, MI, 49684; 231/935-1514.

Or, visit our website at [www.gtbay.org](http://www.gtbay.org)