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Keeping Our River Healthy...

How You Can Help



Keep Yard Waste Out of the River



DID YOU KNOW?

The rivers, lakes, and streams that we use for water supplies and recreation are easily impacted by human activities. Organic materials such as grass clippings, tree trimmings, leaves and other plant materials pollute the water with wastes, pesticides and fertilizers. Yard, garden, and pet waste dumped into or piled near waterways or their drain areas (waiting for floodwater to carry it away) or placed in streets (where it enters waterways through storm drains), has a negative impact on our water.

Water Quality

- Once in the water, yard, garden and pet waste release nutrients which promote over-growth of algae and other nuisance aquatic plants.
- Pet waste contributes to fecal coliform bacteria populations in the river.
- Decay of organic material depletes dissolved oxygen causing potential fish kills.
- Chemicals previously applied to yards, gardens, and trees can be released into the water.

Erosion

- Organic material dumped on riverbanks chokes out natural vegetation causing potential loss of property due to bank erosion.
- Eroded soil is one of the most common pollutants in waterways.

Infrastructure

- Plugged water treatment plant intake screens and grates on storm water outfalls increase maintenance expenses to remove the organic material.
- Street flooding can be caused by storm drains plugged with organic material.

Flooding and Navigation

- Cut logs and tree trimmings could catch on bridge supports, resulting in a “damming” effect which can cause an increase in flood levels.
- Water recreation can be hindered by tree trimmings and cut logs.

LAWS

- States, cities and counties have ordinances against improper disposal of yard, garden and pet waste in or near a river or lake.
- Fines can be levied against violators.
- Some governments charge the homeowner for clean up of illegally disposed organic material.

FACTS*

- Grass clippings are 85% water and 5% nitrogen and when left on the yard provide much of the yard’s fertilizer needs and help conserve soil moisture.
- Grass clippings do not cause thatch. Over fertilizing, infrequent mowing, and incorrect watering cause thatch.
- Homeowners on average use ten times more chemicals on their lawns per acre than farmers use on their fields.
- Some state and local governments have banned the use of fertilizers and pesticides that contain phosphorous because they can cause algae blooms.
- If lawns were classified as a crop, it would rank the fifth largest in the country, based on acreage.

WHAT TO DO

- Sweep yard waste (grass clippings, leaves, etc.) and fertilizers off driveways, sidewalks and roads and properly manage.
- Take yard waste to a neighborhood compost collection site or compost the waste at a site away from the waterway.
- Pick up after pets.
- Apply fertilizer and lawn chemicals sparingly and according to directions.
- Use compost for fertilizer rather than inorganic chemical fertilizers.
- Never dump anything down storm drains, in gutters, streets, ditches, or other areas that drain into a storm sewer or water body.
- Plant bare spots in yards with permanent vegetation to prevent erosion.
- Use a mulching lawn mower for grass and leaves.

By practicing healthy household habits, homeowners can keep common pollutants like fertilizer, pesticides, pet waste, and organic material out of our waterways. Adopt these healthy household habits and help protect our drinking water, fisheries, and recreational opportunities. Remember to share your habits with your neighbors!

CONTACT US

If you have questions about composting, grass recycling, yard waste management, or waste disposal, conduct a web search, contact your local Extension service, city, township, or county office, or contact the North Dakota Department of Health, Division of Waste Management at 701-328-5166 or www.ndhealth.gov/wm/publications.htm.

* Source: Borman et al. “Redesigning the American Lawn”, Yale University Press, 2001

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