

The Source



A Comprehensive Source of Information for Source Water Protection Programs

April 2017

Spring has sprung! Now that temperatures are warming, many folks are looking to their yards and properties for the new season. While preparing and creating a perfect landscape to spend your upcoming days is something we all do, there are some practices that can actually cause harm to our surface waters and groundwater supplies.

This quarter, we are reviewing best management practices and techniques to minimize impacts to our drinking water supplies.

Following these best management practices will keep your lawn looking good while sustaining a healthy watershed.

Regards,
Anne Ruthstrom
Source Water Protection Specialist

Lawns, Landscaping, and Non-point Source Pollution

Point source pollution is pollution that originates from a specific and easily identifiable source. Non-point source pollution is pollution that originates from a variety of places or over a larger area. While the Source Water Protection Program primarily concentrates on point source pollution, contaminants from lawns and landscaping can still be considered a Potential Source of Contamination (PSOC).

Rainfall that is not absorbed onto lawns is runoff that can carry fertilizers and pesticides with it. In most areas, storm water from rainfall flows to storm drains or drainage ditches and then directly to surface waters, never having been treated to remove pollutants before entering our waterways.

Lawns are not always a bad thing!

Properly maintained lawns can provide many environmental benefits, including:

- Reduced soil erosion;
- Reduced run-off by slowing water down as it flows over the property; and
- Average sized lawns create a cooling effect, equal to about 9 tons of air conditioning.

...But runoff pollution from lawns is.

The most likely causes or sources from runoff pollution from laws are:

- Overly fertilized or applied pesticides;
- Applications of fertilizer or pesticides just before a rain event;
- Leaving fertilizer and pesticide granules or affected grass clippings on impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, driveways, or streets where they can be directly carried to surface waters during rain events;
- Dumping of fertilizers and pesticides into storm drains;
- Compaction of soils, increasing rain runoff instead of infiltration into the soil; and
- Overwatering, which leads to runoff and leaching of fertilizers and pesticides.

What can I do?

- Apply only enough water to wet the soil 4"-6" deep to avoid runoff and leached nutrients from the soil.
- Check automatic sprinkler systems regularly to ensure uniform watering.
- Aerate soils over the fall and winter seasons to alleviate compaction and allow water to infiltrate the ground more easily.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to decompose, increasing the soil's organic matter and reducing the need for fertilizer inputs. Sweep grass clippings from driveways and sidewalks to prevent them from carrying fertilizer or pesticides with them to storm drains and surface waters.
- Test the soil to determine what nutrients are needed, reducing the chance of over-fertilizing.
- Calibrate fertilizer spreaders to ensure correct rate applications.
- Avoid fertilizer or pesticide applications just before a rain event.
- Select fertilizers that are fast releasing (water soluble), avoiding those that are slow to release (water insoluble) which are more easily washed away with runoff. Water in fertilizers soon after application, being careful to not over water.
- Use the least toxic pesticides that will effectively control the problem.
- Apply pesticides only as needed, not as a routine.
- Store and dispose of excess fertilizers and pesticides safely. Ask your city or county when the next collection event for Household Hazardous Wastes will be.

Follow these practices, and you'll have a happy, healthy lawn, as well as healthy waterways.

Congratulations to the City of Sweetwater for completing their Source Water Protection Plan!

For assistance with creating or updating a SWP Plan for your System, contact me by email at Anne.Ruthstrom@trwa.org, or by phone at (512) 954-1360.

"I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man." - **Henry James**



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