



Is Your Home Improvement Project Water Friendly?

What a rewarding feeling it is to complete your own home improvement project! But did you know certain practices could contribute to water quality problems in Minnesota's lakes and rivers if special care isn't taken? Rainwater washes wastes from roads, driveways and yards into the nearest storm drain and/or body of water. Unlike the wastewater in your home which is cleaned at a wastewater treatment plant, anything that goes into a storm drain is routed directly into lakes and river's... untreated!

The following suggestions will help you decrease the amount of pollution coming from your home.

PAINTING DOS AND DON'T'S

When painting your house, trim, fencing or anything outside, consider alternatives to your usual routine. A little bit of planning can go a long way in reducing the impact your activities have on our water resources.

TIP: Use latex paint.

Choose water-based paints over oil-based paints. They're less toxic.

TIP: Keep track of paint age.

Don't use paints over 15 years old because they may contain toxic levels of lead.

TIP: Dispose of paints properly.

Excess paint, thinners, solvents, saturated rags, empty aerosol cans, lead paint chips and chemical paint stripping residue are considered hazardous waste and should be taken to a household hazardous waste site.

TIP: Recycle!

Reuse paint thinner or cleaning solvents. Set aside in a closed jar to settle out paint particles, then pour off clear liquid for future use. Be sure you label the jar, so you don't forget what is inside!

TIP: Buy only what you need.

Try to determine the amount of paint you will need. If you have too much, save it and donate it to an organization.

CONCRETE, MASONRY AND TILE WORK

Construction of new driveways, patios, walkways and other brick and concrete structures can greatly impact water quality during the construction process, as well as after the structure is built. Surfaces such as concrete and roofed areas increase the volume and velocity with which rainwater travels to rivers. These types of surfaces do not provide an opportunity for the water to infiltrate into the ground – a process that naturally filters out pollutants collected by rainwater. Try using alternatives, like gravel, brick or flagstone, which allow some water to infiltrate down into the earth. If you must use concrete and impervious materials, try to minimize their effect by sloping such surfaces toward vegetated areas.

TIP: Don't use your hose as a broom!

Never wash excess material from bricklaying or patio/driveway construction into a storm drain. Also, don't hose down driveways, sidewalks, or streets into storm drains. Use a broom instead to sweep up and dispose of waste in the trash.

TIP: Reuse.

Collect and reuse excess sand and gravel.

TIP: Make clean-up simple.

Set up and operate small cement mixers on heavy tarps or drop cloths. Once construction is complete, recycle residual or dispose of it properly.

TIP: Watch the weather.

Apply driveway sealant when rain is not forecasted. If you apply sealant prior to a heavy rain, some of the sealant will wash off, reducing effectiveness of the remaining sealant while also running off to pollute rivers, lakes and rivers. Cover bags of cement and mortar after opening to keep wind-blown dust away from gutters and storm drains.

LANDSCAPING

Many landscaping projects have the potential for exposing soils and adding chemicals to your lawn and garden. When fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides are not applied correctly, storm water will wash the excess into nearby lakes, rivers, and storm drains.

Here's how you can prevent erosion and reduce the impact of your lawn and garden on water resources:

TIP: Watch the weather.

Schedule grading projects for dry weather and replant as soon as possible. If there is lag time between the grading and the final planting, temporary vegetation may be necessary, like an annual grass seed.

TIP: Landscape with hardy plants.

Choose disease- and pest-resistant plant varieties appropriate for your soil and climate.

TIP: Mulch it!

Cover exposed soil in the garden with 2-3 inches of mulch to prevent weeds from surfacing. Don't forget, pulling weeds is a great alternative to spraying with chemicals!

TIP: Let your clippings lay.

Cut grass is natural mulch (and free fertilizer) for your lawn. A mulching mower will cut clippings into tiny pieces and will allow for quicker and easier decomposition.

TIP: Compost... the miracle drug for your yard.

Compost is a natural, slow-release fertilizer that retains water when added to sandy soils and improves drainage when added to clay soils.

TIP: De-bug.

Remove pest-infested plants in the fall. Remove insect eggs, larvae, cocoons, and adults from plants by hand.

TIP: Test your soil.

If you think a fertilizer is necessary, test your soil first. A soil test will tell you how much nutrients your lawn or garden have so that you will not over-apply.