

Protecting our water sources means preventing pollution

“National Water Quality Month” highlights the impact our water systems have on the community

Water is the world’s most precious resource. It must be safe and clean for consumption.

But reports from the Environmental Protection Agency show that 40 percent of the nation’s waterways suffer water quality issues and fail to meet water quality standards. Upstream activities and airborne contaminants are largely responsible for many of the common pollutants in waterways, including high levels of pathogens, mercury, heavy metals, nutrients and sediment.

In August, as we celebrate “National Water Quality Month,” we want to highlight the fact that water pollution isn’t just an environmental concern—it’s also an issue of public health. “National Water Quality Month” emphasizes the interconnectedness of our water systems and the dangers of runoff from agriculture, forestry, construction and personal yards.

Here are some ways to protect water sources:

- **Instead of antibacterial soaps or cleaning products, use detergents that are phosphate-free**—Antibacterial chemicals in soap cannot be completely removed by wastewater treatment facilities.
- **Utilize U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-approved ways of disposing unwanted medications rather than flushing them down the toilet or drain**—Flushing drugs down the toilet or drain sends them directly into the water supply and harms the environment. Most medicines are not removed by wastewater treatment processes or septic systems.
- **Only water should flow into a storm drain**—Excess rain and ground water that flows into storm drains is not piped to a water treatment facility nor is it cleaned before being returned to streams and rivers.
- **Fix leaks on cars and put liners in driveway to collect oil and other materials**—These leaks and drips contribute to storm water pollution.
- **Avoid using pesticides or chemical fertilizers**—Pesticides and chemical fertilizers pose a threat to human health and pollute both ground and surface water.
- **Choose nontoxic household products**—Many cleaning products are harmful to aquatic life, water quality and the overall ecosystem.
- **Pick up after your pets**—Pet waste can infiltrate storm drains and spread bacteria.
- **Sweep your driveway instead of hosing it off to keep it clean**—Polluted water flows down the street and into the storm drain.
- **Use a commercial car wash**—Cleaning your car at home flushes dangerous chemicals down the storm drain and directly into lakes and streams.

Participating in local waterway cleanups are another way to ensure the safety and quality of your water while making a conscious effort to minimize your personal impact on the environment and water systems.

Making water education a priority is also helpful in making sure that you’re doing all you can to ensure high quality water. Get educated about what’s in your water and encourage your neighbors to do the same. You can all make a difference to protect water quality for the future.