

Eye on the Environment: Keep waterway pollutants from where the flow goes

By Kelly Hahs

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What do gardens, pets and automobiles have in common? They have distinct personalities and can inspire passionate responses, including dedication, fervor and love.

We do what we can to make them the best they can be. Sometimes, however, we overlook the need to look out for our health, community and environment in the process.

The Ventura Countywide Stormwater Quality Management Program has produced a series of brochures on ways to help keep the objects of our affection healthy without causing unintentional harm to our watersheds.

A watershed is the total land area, including yards and driveways, from which stormwater drains into bodies of water such as rivers, lakes and the ocean. It includes the networks of gutters, pipes and open channels that direct untreated runoff away from our communities and into waterways.

Tips in the brochures include:

- Gardeners: Help your garden and wallet thrive by carefully reading labels on pesticides and fertilizers and applying only the recommended amounts as needed. Store them under cover, out of the rain, and never use them near bare ground, paved areas, drains or within 24 hours of rain. This will help keep the chemicals and nutrients where they are needed, reducing the cost to the environment and your wallet.

Try making your own fertilizer by composting yard waste and vegetable scraps, and explore integrated pest management as an alternative to pesticides. Careful watering will keep water where it is needed and prevent it from carrying pollutants into our waterways. Choose native plants that are pest- and drought-resistant to maximize your garden's efficiency and beauty and help keep your water bills low.

- Pet owners: Help keep your yard, neighborhood and favorite pet-walking places looking and smelling fresh by picking up after your pet and disposing of the waste in sealed bags in the trash. Pet waste can contain harmful bacteria and carry diseases.

Waste left on the ground not only is unpleasant to look at, but the bacteria also can be washed into waterways when it rains, creating potentially dangerous conditions in rivers and on beaches after a storm. Pet waste is organic but not a safe fertilizer for your yard or the watershed.

- Car owners: Keep your vehicle sparkling by washing it on your lawn or at a carwash, not on the street or driveway. Water is an overachiever when it comes to carrying contaminants into the environment, so minimizing runoff is important.

Prevent leaks by performing regular maintenance, and use drip pans to catch used fluids. Combining different types of used fluids can cause dangerous chemical reactions and prevents the fluids from being recycled.

Store all automotive fluids separately in tightly capped leak- and spillproof containers, out of the weather, until they can be properly disposed of at a collection center or event. If spills occur, use dry methods like kitty litter or rags to clean them up, not

water. Help keep lead and sulfuric acid out of the environment by taking advantage of the California law that requires stores that sell batteries to accept old ones.

All of these tips and more are available in the new brochures, coming soon to plant nurseries, pet stores and auto parts retailers, or view them online at <http://www.cleanwatershed.org>.

It's simple, really: What we put on the ground in our yards and communities can wind up in our rivers, lakes and ocean. If you wouldn't want to swim in it, then use and dispose of it properly.

— *Kelly Hahs is a water quality analyst for the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. She can be reached at kelly.hahs@ventura.org. Representatives of government or nonprofit agencies who want to submit articles on environmental topics for this column should contact David Goldstein at 658-4312 or david.goldstein@ventura.org.*



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