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Keep Garden Pesticides Out of Storm Drains:New Public Service Campaign Kicks Off To Educate Resident

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by Community for a Clean Watershed on Wednesday, September 15, 2010 at 1:33pm ·

Just in time for the peak summer gardening season, a new public service campaign was introduced last week to educate Ventura County residents on how they can keep dangerous residential pesticides out of the Ventura County watershed.

This public service campaign is sponsored by "Community for a Clean Watershed," a program established two years ago by the Ventura Countywide Stormwater Quality Management Program, a coalition of storm water quality management agencies in all 10 cities and unincorporated areas of Ventura County.

A watershed includes all of the natural terrain and communities surrounding major bodies of water. Water from these areas in Ventura County, whether from rain runoff or from a resident's sprinkler system, finds its way into the Ventura and Santa Clara Rivers, Malibu and Calleguas Creeks, and bays and estuaries until it eventually empties into the sea.

The campaign's goal is to influence people's habits and provide residents a better understanding of what happens when yard pollutants are washed into neighborhood gutters and storm drains. When pesticides reach our creeks and streams, wildlife is affected. If we aren't sensible in our use of pesticides, our environment can suffer a variety of negative impacts. Poisons can affect animals up the food chain, upsetting the delicate balance of our river ecosystems. There are also economic impacts. For example, if we don't meet standards set by current environmental laws and regulations, the state will require our communities to spend more taxpayer money on measures to prevent polluted urban run-off from flowing into waterways.

Every resident can take simple precautions to ensure water remains clean, including reading the labels and following directions carefully when using insecticides, herbicides and fertilizers on lawns and in gardens; using less-toxic products such as biologicallyfriendly pesticides, oil sprays and insecticidal soaps; and avoiding use of copper sulfate root killing products (when possible, pull weeds by hand instead).

A key contributor to storm water pollution is the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers in our gardens. Ant spray and snail bait are two of the biggest culprits; use these, and other chemicals, sparingly and never use them around water bodies and drains. Do not use chemicals in your garden if rain is predicted within 24 hours. Remember, products that are designed to kill ants and snails in your garden may potentially affect other animals living in or near our waterways.

Save money while protecting the environment by carefully applying these chemicals only where, and when, needed, and not on areas like driveways and sidewalks. Never sweep anything, including leaves and grass clippings, into the street. Instead, discard these materials in curbside green waste collection carts or use a backyard compost bin. To prevent chemicals from washing off your yard or garden, minimize excessive lawn or garden watering by using timers for your sprinklers and watering only as needed.

Also, keep chemicals in sealed containers and protect them from exposure to the elements by storing them in a garage or shed. If garden chemicals spill, they should not be hosed down into the gutter. Instead, sweep or, if liquid, absorb them with sawdust or kitty litter, place the material into a sealed container, and dispose of any large absorbed spills at a local household hazardous waste collection event or facility.

The countywide stormwater program analyzes local rivers six times a year for various contaminants. Ventura County's watershed is in fairly good shape, but not without its pollution problems, small problems which can grow into big ones if residents don't take precautions now.

This month-long campaign, created by "The Agency," a public relations firm in Camarillo, will include radio, television, print, online and outdoor public service announcements. For more watershed pollution prevention tips, go to www.cleanwatershed.org.

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Arne Anselm is the Water Quality Monitoring Manager for the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. His organization supports the "Community for a Clean Watershed" program and its public education efforts.

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