



Healthy Household Habits

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Healthy Household Habits for Clean Water

Water washing over the land, whether from rain, snow melt, car washing or the watering of lawns and gardens picks up an array of contaminants including oils, metals and bacteria. These contaminants are deposited directly into local waterways overland or transported through catch basins. In Cambridge this runoff finds its way to the Charles River and to the Alewife Brook. The Environmental Protection Agency has determined that pollution from water runoff is the single largest cause of our nation's water quality problems. Everyday personal actions you take can have a significant impact on the quality of water in our local rivers.



By practicing healthy household habits, residents can keep common pollutants like pesticides, pet waste, and automotive fluids off the ground and out of our rivers. Adopt these healthy household habits and help protect the Charles River and the Alewife Brook. Remember to share these habits with your family and neighbors!

Lawn and Garden - Excess fertilizers and pesticides applied to lawns and gardens wash off and pollute local waterways. In addition, yard clippings and leaves can wash into catch basins and contribute nutrients and organic matter in our rivers.

- Use pesticide and fertilizers sparingly. When use is necessary, use these chemicals in the recommended amounts. Avoid applications if the forecast calls for rain. Purchase and use nontoxic and biodegradable products whenever possible.
- Select native plants and grasses that are drought and pest resistant. Native plants require less water, fertilizer and pesticides.
- Sweep up yard debris, rather than hosing down areas.
- Recycle yard waste including leaves, grass, plants, shrub prunings and twigs. Place in barrels with City stickers or in paper yard waste bags. Call Public Works at 617.349.4800 for yard waste stickers or for information about buying a rodent-proof compost bin for \$25.



- Don't over water your lawns and gardens. Water during the cool times of the day, and don't let water run off into the catch basins. Install a rain barrel or cistern to capture the rainwater from your roof for use in your yard.
- Before beginning an outdoor project, locate the nearest catch basin and protect them from debris and other materials.
- Cover piles of dirt and mulch being used in landscape projects to prevent these from being blown or washed into catch basins. Vegetate bare spots in your yard to prevent soil erosion.

Landscaping - Minimize the stormwater runoff from your property by simple changes in your landscape.

- Reduce the amount of paved area and increase the amount of vegetated areas or permeable areas in your yard. Redirect downspouts away from paved surfaces and onto vegetated areas to increase infiltration.
- Install Rain Barrels or Cisterns to collect rainwater from rooftops in mosquito proof containers. The water can be used later to water lawn or garden areas. Check with Cambridge DPW to see if they are sponsoring a Rain Barrel sales event.
- Install Rain Gardens and Grassy Swales to collect rainwater and allows it to soak into the ground.



Pet Care - Pet waste can be a major source of bacteria and excess nutrients in local waters.

- Always clean up after your pet and dispose of the waste in the trash, in a sealed or tied plastic bag, or in a toilet.

Auto Care - Washing your car, degreasing auto parts and doing tune-ups at home can send detergent, oil and other contaminants to local waterways. Dumping automotive fluids into catch basins has the same results as dumping the materials directly into the Charles River and Alewife Brook.

- Use a commercial car wash or wash your car on a lawn or other unpaved surface to minimize the amount of dirty, soapy water flowing into catch basins.
- Check your car, motorcycle and other machinery and equipment for leaks and spills. Make repairs as soon as possible. Clean up spilled fluids with an absorbent material, and don't wash spills into nearby catch basins. Remember to properly dispose of the absorbent material.
- Recycle used oil and other automotive fluids. Don't dump them down the catch basin or dispose of them in your trash. Residents can bring used motor oil to Public Works during regular business hours and to the Recycling Drop-Off Center Tues/Thurs 4-7:30 and Sat 9-4pm.
- Reduce automobile use by carpooling, riding public transportation, riding your bike or walking. When it rains, air pollution turns into stormwater pollution.



Remember - Don't pour household products that contain chemicals on the ground, into catch basins or down the drain. Products such as insecticides, pesticides, oil-based paint, solvents, and used motor oil and other auto fluids must be properly disposed. The City of Cambridge sponsors several Household Hazardous Waste collection events each year.



Stormwater Hotline:

Report illegal dumping into catch basins or dirty looking discharges from outfalls to the DPW by calling (617) 349-4800 or (617) 349-4846, or by e-mail to: TheWorks@cambridgema.gov

For more information, see www.cambridgema.gov/TheWorks and <http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/whatis.html>