

Preventing Pollution at Home

Information Sheet

Protecting Our Streams and Shorelines

Did you know that water that falls as rain on your property can mix with household chemicals and cause pollution? Many of the activities around our homes can impact the health of our local creeks, rivers and the ocean.

When it rains, water travels across our driveways, roofs, property and perimeter drains, and picks up any chemicals, metal, dirt and oil outside. This rainwater then enters our stormwater system, which connects to our natural waterways.

Here are some best practices that you can do around your home to help prevent pollution in your rainwater.



DIY Tip: Keep rags handy in case of spills during your reno project.

Power Wash Carefully

Power washing can loosen pollutants (like paint chips or oily sediments) and cause chemical residues and soaps to flow into the storm drain system, harming aquatic life and habitat.

Here's what you can do to power wash responsibly:

- Identify your nearest storm drain and prevent runoff from entering it.
- Clean sidewalks and driveways with a brush or broom, rather than power washing.
- If you have to power wash, sweep the surface before washing and use absorbents on oil spots.
- Avoid using cleaning compounds whenever possible.

Painting Outside

All paints, solvents and adhesives contain chemicals that are harmful to aquatic life in our waterways.

- Be prepared for a spill. Have absorbent materials and other clean-up items accessible in case you need them.
- Ensure that all liquid paint products and wastes stay out of our storm drains. Never pour paint on the ground or down storm drains.
- Ensure paints and solvents are properly stored. For info on how to dispose of any paints, chemicals, pesticides, varnishes, cleaners and bleach, visit crd.bc.ca/hhw.

Properly Dispose of Pool and Spa Water

Pools and spas or hot tubs contain saltwater, chlorine or bromine along with algaecide, fungicide and chemical sanitizers. Draining these waters improperly can harm fish in our local waterways.

- Do not drain water from pools, spas or hot tubs down the storm drain. Pool and Spa water should be discharged to the sanitary sewer via a basement drain or toilet.
- Properly store and dispose of chemicals and additives according to the instructions on the label to avoid leaks.
- Contact your municipal public works department for advice on how to deal with pool and spa water, if unsure.

The easiest way to protect creeks, rivers and the ocean is to never pour anything down the storm drain and to make sure the water on your property doesn't pick up contaminants that wash into the storm drain.





Pesticides and Fertilizers

Pesticides and fertilizers can pollute soil and groundwater, and remain in the environment long after application. If they enter our stormwater, the chemicals in pesticides and fertilizers pollute our streams, creeks and waterways. Here's how you can manage them safely:

- **Never pour excess chemicals down the storm drain or onto the ground.**
- **Properly dispose of unwanted pesticides and chemicals** according to the instructions on the label.
- **Fertilize with organic compost** that will not harm the environment.
- **Encourage the presence of beneficial creatures** that will naturally enhance your garden and lawn (spiders, bees, ladybugs, frogs and bats).
- Reduce use of these chemicals by using **companion planting techniques**, practice crop rotation and garden with native plants

Avoid Oil Leaks

Home heating oil tanks can fail, leading to oil spills and causing potential health risks and environmental damage. Once spilled, rain and irrigation water carries oil through the soil into residential perimeter drains, which quickly carries oil into the storm drain systems, and then empties directly into creeks, harbours or shorelines.

You can make sure that your home heating oil tank doesn't leak by following these steps:

- **Routinely inspect and maintain your heating oil system;** Remove any underground oil tanks that are aging, abandoned or decommissioned.
- Install new tanks as required by your local Fire Department.
- Consider replacing your oil tank with greener heating choices. **CleanBC Better Homes** offers up to \$5350 per home to help BC residents upgrade from fossil fuel heating to efficient heat pumps. To learn more at crd.bc.ca/heatpump.

Care For Your Sewer Pipes & Septic System

All pipes need maintenance. Learn about inspecting, maintaining and repairing the pipes on your property such as septic or sewer pipes, stormwater laterals and foundation drains to prevent back-ups and pollution.

- Clear eavestroughs and downspouts twice a year.
- Avoid planting water-loving trees over your pipes.
- Don't put fats, oils and grease down the drain or flushable wipes, napkins or paper towels down toilets or drains.
- Have sewer pipes inspected with a camera about every 10 years or more often for older homes.
- Have your septic system inspected every one to five years, depending on the type of system you have.

Learn more crd.bc.ca/cleanwater.

How to Report a Spill

If you see or experience a spill please call Emergency Management BC at 1.800.663.3456 (24/7)

A 'spill' is an accidental spill, leak, or illicit dumping of a substance. Spills can be on land or in water and may include fuels (gasoline, home heating oil, motor oil, etc.), paint, antifreeze, acidic or caustic substances and sewage. Learn more at www.gov.bc.ca/spillresponse.



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