

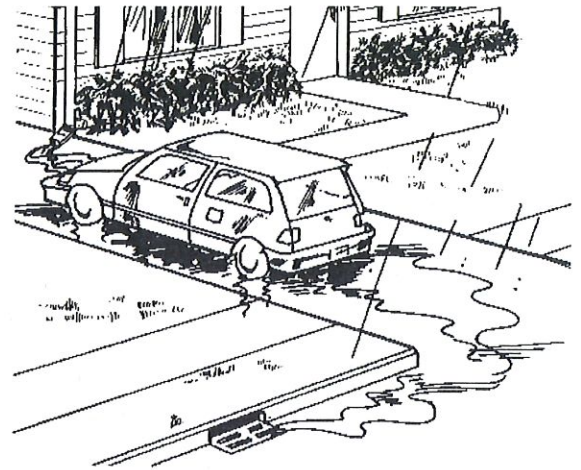
Modern-day activities, especially in urban areas, have greatly disrupted the cycle of water movement and polluted much of our water. It may be a surprise to learn that many of the things we do in our communities and around our homes can create environmental problems.

In the community

Removal of vegetation during development and its replacement with streets, rooftops, and driveways has significantly decreased the amount of rainfall absorbed by the soil. As a consequence, the amount of water running off toward nearby lakes and streams has increased dramatically.

In addition, stormwater drainage systems are typically designed to remove water from developed areas as quickly as possible during a storm. While these systems are convenient for urban residents, they also carry pollutants to surface waters at a "rapid transit" pace. Contrary to popular belief, pet wastes, oil and other materials dumped into storm sewer grates do not go to the sewage treatment plant, but flow directly to streams and lakes.

The connection between auto maintenance and water quality can be very serious and direct. Anything that drips from a motor vehicle onto pavement – oil, gasoline, brake fluid, antifreeze – can quickly be flushed into lakes with a rainstorm. These materials



are toxic to downstream aquatic life. Downspouts positioned to empty directly onto driveways compound the problem.

Dumping oil into a storm sewer grate has almost unthinkable consequences. Five quarts of oil can create a slick as large as two football fields and persist on mud or plants for six months or more.

Time to rethink

Clearly, there is a need to rethink what we're doing at home if urban waters are to be clean and usable. Nowhere is this truer than in our use of lawn and garden chemicals. To understand some of the problems caused by our "chemical dependence" and the advantages of introducing natural processes into lawn and garden care, read on . . .

Many sources of water pollution originate right at home. Fertilizers and pesticides can wash into storm sewers, which carry the chemicals to lakes and streams.

Around the home

Many sources of urban water pollution originate right at home. For example, fertilizer and pesticides applied to lawns in excessive amounts or before heavy rains can wash into ditches and storm sewers. These chemicals then travel to lakes and streams. If used near lakeshores or streambanks – even in modest amounts – lawn chemicals may quickly find their way into the water.

Similarly, leaves and grass clippings naturally contain nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen. If leaves and grass are raked to the curb, the nutrients they contain can be washed away before collection and end up in our waters. Leaves and grass can also clog storm sewers and contribute to localized flooding. On the other hand, the practice of burning these yard "wastes" not only releases air pollutants, but the ashes can pollute lakes and streams if carried away by runoff waters.

