



# STATE OF NEVADA

Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### Celebrate Earth Day by Protecting Our Water

CARSON CITY - With Earth Day coming up on April 22, the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) is encouraging residents to celebrate the event by helping protect our state's precious water resources.

"Nevada is the driest state in the nation, so it's important that we do everything we can to protect our water resources," said Birgit Widegren, supervisor of NDEP's Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program. "We can each do our part to help reduce water pollution, particularly nonpoint source pollution."

Nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is polluted runoff resulting from water washing over the land from rain, private car washing or the watering of crops or lawns. Along the way, the runoff picks up an array of contaminants, including oil and sediment from roadways, agricultural chemicals from farmland, and nutrients and toxic materials from urban and suburban areas. The polluted runoff eventually finds its way into the state's waterways, either directly or through storm drain collection systems.

Widegren noted that Nevada's rapid growth and development has made nonpoint source pollution the leading cause of water pollution in the state. It negatively impacts surface waters, groundwater, drinking water supplies, water-based recreation, fisheries and wildlife.

"Each of us can play a crucial role in helping to control water pollution by making some simple changes in our personal habits and helping to bring about change in our community," she said

She provided the following tips to help concerned citizens protect Nevada's waters:

#### Household Chemicals

- Properly dispose of chemicals, such as cleaning solvents, paint thinners and moth balls, by taking them to hazardous waste collection centers.
- Do not dispose of chemicals with your regular household trash. Chemicals can leach from landfills and contaminate the groundwater.

- Do not pour chemicals or pharmaceuticals down any drain or dispose of them in the toilet. Doing so may disrupt your septic system or send contaminants to water treatment plants where trace amounts can enter the drinking water.
- Do not dispose of chemicals in storm drains. Storm drains deliver these chemicals directly to streams and rivers without treatment.
- Never pour unwanted chemicals onto the ground. Soil cannot purify most chemicals, so they can be picked up in runoff and make their way into surface waters and groundwater.
- Select non-toxic or less-toxic alternatives whenever possible.
- Buy chemicals only in the amount you expect to use, and apply them only as directed.

## **Landscaping and gardening**

- When landscaping your yard, use a design that minimizes grassy areas and incorporates plants that have low requirements for water, fertilizers and pesticides.
- Leave lawn clippings on your lawn so the nutrients in the clippings will be recycled. This will reduce the frequency and amount of fertilizers you need to apply, and will reduce yard waste that ends up in the landfill.
- Litter, leaves and sediment can clog storm drain systems, causing flooding. To prevent this, keep street gutters and storm drains free of these materials.
- Install wood decking, bricks or interlocking stones, instead of impervious cement walkways which encourage runoff.
- Redirect rain gutters onto vegetated or mulched areas where runoff will be absorbed into the ground.

## **Fertilizers, Herbicides, Pesticides**

- Carefully read labels on fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, and apply them only as directed. Remember, more is not better.
- Test your soil before applying fertilizers. Over-fertilization is a common cause of nonpoint source pollution, because the excess leaches into groundwater or runs off into our rivers and lakes.
- Use slow-release fertilizers on areas where the potential for leaching or runoff is high, such as sandy soils, steep slopes, compacted soils, and near streams and lakes.
- Apply fertilizers at the proper times of the season to maximize their absorption and effectiveness.
- Do not apply pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers before or during rain storms.
- If you use a professional lawn care service, select a company that employs trained technicians and minimizes the use of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.

## **Septic Systems**

Improperly installed or maintained septic systems can contaminate groundwater and surface water with nutrients and pathogens. By following the recommendations below, you can help ensure that your system functions properly.

- Inspect your septic system annually, and pump it out regularly. Pumping out the tank every three to five years is recommended for a three-bedroom house with a 1,000-gallon tank; smaller tanks should be pumped more often.

- Do not use septic system additives. There is no scientific evidence that biological and chemical additives aid or accelerate decomposition in septic tanks; some additives may, in fact, be detrimental to the septic system or contaminate groundwater.
- Minimize the use of your garbage disposal. Garbage disposals contribute unnecessary solids to your septic system, and can increase the frequency your tank needs to be pumped.

## **Automobiles**

- Take your car to a certified car wash. Certified car washes collect and properly dispose of wash water. If you must wash your car at home, pull onto a grassy area, so the soapy water can soak into the ground.
- Inspect your vehicle regularly for leaks, and make sure it is properly maintained so oil and other chemicals don't drip onto your driveway or parking lots.
- Recycle used oil and antifreeze by taking them to recycling centers. Never pour used oil or other chemicals down storm drains, onto soil or into the trash.
- Clean up spilled brake fluid, oil, grease, antifreeze and other toxic chemicals, rather than hosing them into the street, where they eventually can be carried in runoff to area streams and lakes.

## **Pet Waste**

Pet waste contains nutrients, pathogens and viruses that can contaminate surface waters. When taking your pets for walks, remember to bring along plastic bags to clean up after them. Dispose of the waste in the garbage.

## **Water Conservation**

- Don't hose down driveways or sidewalks. It wastes water and washes pollutants into the storm drain. Instead, sweep these areas and put the waste in the trash.
- Use low-flow faucets and showerheads, reduced-flow toilets, and other water-saving devices.
- Quickly repair leaking faucets, toilets, and pumps.
- Use dishwashers and clothes washers only when fully loaded.
- Take short showers instead of baths, and avoid letting faucets run unnecessarily.
- Do not over-water your lawn or garden. Over-watering can increase runoff to the storm drain and leaching of fertilizers into the groundwater.
- Use trickle irrigation or soaker hoses. Such devices reduce runoff and are 20 percent more efficient than sprinklers.

For more information, contact the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection's Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program at 775-687-9444.

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