



Nitrogen and Phosphorus Pollution: What You Can Do

Nitrogen and phosphorus are essential nutrients for aquatic life, and they are naturally present in water. However, excessive levels can fuel the growth of algae, including Harmful Algal Blooms that put humans, pets, livestock and wildlife at risk. Fish and other wildlife may also be stressed by reduced oxygen levels that sometimes occur as algae decompose.

Sources of excessive nitrogen and phosphorus include farm runoff and erosion, urban stormwater runoff, sewer and septic systems, fossil fuel emissions, and home and yard practices. These tips focus on ways individuals can take action to reduce their contribution to pollution:

Maintain your septic system

If you don't live in an area with central sewers, you should have your septic system professionally inspected annually, and pumped out every two-to-five years, depending on its capacity and the size of your household.

Reduce and eliminate use and runoff of lawn fertilizer

New York State prohibits the use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus. Perform a soil test to see if fertilization is necessary, and apply only in recommended amounts in Spring and Fall, in dry weather. To avoid runoff, don't over-water your lawn.

Clean up dog waste

Whether you walk your dog on the sidewalk or a foot trail, their waste can contribute to water pollution if not cleaned up. Storm drains are usually direct connections to streams, and waste left in natural areas can be washed into streams during rain.

Choose phosphate-free detergents and soaps

Sale of most phosphate-containing soaps and detergents are not allowed under New York State law, but car wash often contains phosphorus. Use a commercial car wash, or wash your car on a lawn where soapy water can soak in, and not run off onto the street or into a stream.

Reduce runoff from your property

Ensure that your gutters aren't connected to storm or sanitary sewers, and capture as much rainwater as possible that falls on your roof, driveway and yard in rain barrels, rain gardens or other areas that allows it to soak into the ground, rather than run off.

For more information

NYS Dishwasher Detergent and Nutrient Runoff Law: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67239.html>

Nutrient Pollution: What You Can DO: <https://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution/what-you-can-do>