

# When You Fertilize Your Lawn Improperly, Our Water is Affected

## How does fertilizing my lawn cause pollution?

- Improperly fertilizing a lawn by using too much product or fertilizing too often contributes to water pollution.
- Phosphorous in fertilizers causes algae to grow, which competes for oxygen that fish and other biotic life need.
- If you apply fertilizer just before a rainstorm, much of it will be washed into the storm sewers and from there to the nearest stream, river or lake.
- If you allow fertilizer to sit on the sidewalk or paved driveway/street, you might as well dump it directly in the nearest creek, stream or river. That's where it's going to end up.

## What can I do?

- Use fertilizers sparingly.
  - Lawns and many plants do not need as much fertilizer or need it as often as you might think.
  - Test your soil to be sure what it needs.
  - Consider using organic fertilizers, which release nutrients more slowly.
- Don't fertilize before a rainstorm.
- Use commercially available compost, or make your own using garden/yard waste.
  - Mixing compost with your soil means your plants will need less chemical fertilizer and puts your waste to good use.
  - Commercial compost and soil amendments may be available from your local Solid Waste Management District or wastewater utility, as well as your local garden store.
- Don't bag the grass! Use a mulching lawn mower to cut one-third of the blade length each week and naturally fertilize your lawn with grass clippings.
- Wash your spreader and equipment on a pervious or penetrable vegetated area like the lawn, not on the driveway. This allows for the natural absorption of excess fertilizer.
- Maintain a buffer strip of un-mowed natural vegetation, such as wildflowers and native grasses, bordering watercourses and ponds. This traps the runoff of excess fertilizers and sediment from lawns/gardens.

## Where can I get more information?

For more information, contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management at (317) 232-8172, or visit Recycle Indiana's Solid Waste Management Districts. For information on fertilizing alternatives and composting, call your local Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service. Local phone numbers may be found at <http://www.ag.purdue.edu/extension/Pages/Countries.aspx>.