

P³ POLLUTION PREVENTION POST

YOUR NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCE ABOUT: RECYCLING, POLLUTION PREVENTION, LESS TOXIC PRODUCTS

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
SAN MATEO COUNTY



Protecting Our Health and Environment

EARTH DAY

April 22nd



Volunteer opportunities:

www.flowstobay.org/calendar

Look for us at the Home Show

Cow Palace

March 26-28th



De-Paving Paradise: Green Streets and Parking Lots

Think for a moment about a rain drop that falls in an undisturbed landscape – a forest, woodland area, or grassland. Water is captured and absorbed into the soil filtering out into groundwater or nearby waterways. Now, think about the last time you were walking in the rain. More than likely you were walking on a paved surface – sidewalk or parking lot. What happens to rain when it falls in heavily urbanized areas like San Mateo County?

The paving of land for streets, sidewalks, and parking lots changes the way water is cycled in our environment. Unable to be absorbed into the ground through pavement, rainwater is instead washed down stormdrain pipes that go directly into local waterways, taking with it any pollutants – car fluids, litter, and pesticides – that it picks up along the way. This stormwater runoff is the largest source of pollution entering local creeks and the San Francisco Bay. But there are solutions – and they are happening now! New design practices are changing stormwater runoff from a waste to a resource.

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Greenwashing

Advertisers respond to whatever consumers care about – cost, quality, safety, and increasingly the environmental impacts of products and services. When the information they provide is accurate, it can be very helpful for deciding among the many choices available.

Unfortunately, the high demand coupled with a lack of legal clarity about environmental claims, has led to a practice known as greenwashing.

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Green Challenge

What can you do during the next few months to gradually green your routine? Remember, each small step adds up to changes that will benefit the health of the planet—and, yes, even your own health—immediately and in years to come.

Challenge #1:

Leave grass clippings on the lawn.

It is actually okay not to apply a fertilizer at all and it certainly isn't necessary to fertilize routinely. Let your grass clippings fertilize the lawn for you. Fertilizers can leach through the soil to the ground water, or are washed off your lawn and into nearby stormdrains leading to your nearest water body. These nutrients can contaminate our drinking water and cause rapid algae growth in the bay. Too much algae growth chokes out water bodies and not only makes swimming and boating unpleasant, but also can block out sunlight and deplete the water of oxygen, killing fish and other animals. By not using or reducing the amount of fertilizer that you use, you can help stop this negative impact. Most lawns can draw the nutrients they need from the clippings that fall back into the grass after mowing. For more information visit:

www.greenscapes.org/Fertilizer

Challenge #2:

Green Audit Your Household Cleaners

Check all your household cleaners and replace a synthetic cleaning product with a more environmentally sustainable one once you have used up your current supply. Or, you can make your own natural non-toxic homemade cleaner.

Cleaning products are everywhere in our homes: dish soap, all purpose cleaners,



detergents, oven cleaners, etc. Most of these cleaning products are petroleum-based and can present several health and environmental concerns. They may contain chemicals associated with eye, skin, or respiratory irritation, or other human health issues. Instead of opting for synthetic cleaning products, there are plenty of natural products and methods that keep a house clean and fresh-smelling without the



San Mateo County Green Business Program

Did you know that the County of San Mateo has a Green Business Program that started on July 1, 2007? More than 100 businesses and public agencies have been certified. The Green Business Program recognizes businesses that comply with environmental regulations and take steps to conserve natural resources and prevent pollution. To learn more about the program or to become a certified Green Business visit www.recycleworks.org

toxic side effects. Many of these products are non-toxic, biodegradable, and made from renewable resources (not petroleum). In addition, you can also make your own home-mixed cleaners. Visit www.flowstobay.org/toxic for a Less Toxic Household Recipe List.

Let us know what routine you are replacing with a green option and how it's working for you. Send us an email at:

pollutionprevention@co.sanmateo.ca.us

Used Oil/Filter Recycling

As a do-it-yourselfer you may be unaware that it is illegal to throw used oil and oil filters in the garbage. When you recycle your used motor oil and filters you keep oil out of our rivers, lakes, streams and even the ground water. We all share the responsibility of protecting our environment and keeping our waters safe. Do the right thing and recycle oil filters along with used oil.

How to Find a Recycling Center Near You:

Many service stations, repair facilities and quick lubes will accept used oil and used oil filters. In San Mateo County, there are over 60 locations that accept used motor oil; and of these, 50 will also accept your used oil filters, all for free.

Visit www.flowstobay.org/autocare or call 1-800-CLEANUP to find a recycling location near you.



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Spring Cleaning?

Clearing out your old latex paint, pool chemicals, pesticides, antifreeze, and other household hazardous waste? Don't know how to dispose of them? Make a free drop-off appointment online with the Household Hazardous Waste Program at www.smhealth.org/hhw or by calling 650-363-4718.

But before heading out the door, remember some items, including used motor oil, household batteries, electronics and pharmaceuticals, can be dropped off at other convenient locations in your area. Check www.flowstobay.org/toxic more for details.



March Event:

FREE USED OIL RECYCLING CONTAINER

On March 6, 2010 from 10am to 2pm

San Mateo County will be giving away used oil recycling containers to the first 100 customers at:

Kragen Auto Parts

2411 El Camino Real,

Redwood City, CA 94063.

(Limit of 1 container per household.)



Good Bug or Bad Bug?

The picture on the right is a bug you want in your garden. It is actually a ladybug. People often mistake the larval stage of good bugs for bad bugs that they try to get rid of. Thousands of ladybug larvae have been killed because they were thought to be a garden pest. Both as adults and larvae, ladybugs eat huge numbers of insects. It is believed that one ladybug can devour 5,000 aphids in its lifetime. Other good bugs include: green lacewing, soldier beetle, dragonfly, bee, syrphid fly, ground beetle, parasitic wasp, spider, and tachinid fly. For a colorful brochure featuring pictures of the adult and larva stage on the *10 Most Wanted Bugs In Your Garden* call 650-372-6245 or visit www.flowstobay.org/pestcontrol to download it.



Don't Spray for Ants Outside!

Did you know that 90% of pyrethroid pesticides that end up polluting our waterways are from spraying for ants along the perimeter of buildings? Pyrethroids are a class of pesticides that harm aquatic life and are found in Bay Area creeks and the Bay. If you hire a company to spray for ants or other insect pests around your home or office, ask the company which pesticide they use. If the name ends in *-thrin* more than likely it is a pyrethroid.

Ask for another method of treatment, called IPM or Integrated Pest Management, that often involves use of containerized baits instead. You can find IPM certified companies at :

- EcoWise Certified
www.ecowisecertified.org
- Green Shield Certified
www.greenshieldcertified.org
- The factsheet "Finding a Company that Can Prevent Pest Problems" at www.flowstobay.org/pestcontrol or call 650-372-6245 to have one mailed to you.



De-Paving Paradise (con't)

Green Streets and Parking Lots in San Mateo County

Green streets and parking lots are designed to act more like the natural environment. In San Bruno, the landscaped area at 3rd Avenue near Belle Air Elementary School is actually a “street creek”, composed of a special soil mixture to help runoff soak into the ground, and plants that tolerate wet and dry conditions. Water enters the street creek on one end and is slowed down by pea gravel, exiting on the other side cleaner than when it came in - and some of it even soaks into the ground.



At Brisbane City Hall, a green parking lot has been designed with the addition of a “rain garden” engineered to collect stormwater from the parking lot and building roof. Runoff is treated as it filters through the specially selected vegetation and soaks into the ground. Drain lines buried in the rain garden (the underdrain system) collect the treated water and send it through the stormdrain system to Brisbane Lagoon and out into the Bay. More examples can be found in the design guidebook, available for free download at www.flowstobay.org/greenstreets

Reduce Polluted Runoff around Your Home

Every action counts in helping to improve the quality of our local creeks, the Bay, and Pacific Ocean. Try the following to reduce the effects of paved and impervious surfaces:

- Keep as much landscaped areas as you can, using sustainable, natural/organic, and less toxic methods to control weeds and insects.
- Direct drain spouts from your roof to landscaped areas. Use pervious materials like sand, crushed rock, or pavers.

Greenwashing (con't)

Attempts to mislead consumers usually come in several recognizable forms: using words with no legal meaning (“all natural”); adding a made-up label or certification (“Eco-Safe”); taking credit for meeting legal requirements as though they were voluntary (“Now PCB-free!”); highlighting the one benefit of an otherwise harmful product (“I’m reusable!” on a plastic bag); taking credit for being much better ‘corporate citizens’ than their track record warrants (“Your partner in a better future.” – now that we’ve settled those lawsuits and paid those fines.); and just being vague (“environmentally friendly”).

Consumers are right to be skeptical – we know to take all marketing with a grain of salt (“New! Improved!” Really?). But greenwashing does some harm that those who vote with their dollars should care about. First, it fools shoppers in the short term, giving unfair advantage to companies with the best ads, not the best products or services. Second, it creates cynicism, making consumers lose faith in the value of choices that really are better environmentally.

What can you Do?

- Be aware that claims like “all natural” and “non-toxic” don’t have legal meaning.
- If a product carries a “green” label, check who issued it. The company itself? An industry group? A reliable non-profit or government agency?
- Check environmental claims that seem suspicious with the *Greenwash Index* or other watchdog programs (such as Greenpeace’s Stop Greenwash campaign).
- Buy locally, from vendors you know, whenever possible. Show interest in the materials and processes they use, asking friendly but firm questions to educate yourself.

