

Your Watershed

by the Russian River Watershed Association

Trash in the Street Gets in the Creek

How do all those cigarette butts, soda bottles, beer cans, and tennis balls end up strewn along the banks or our creeks? Litter in the street can wind up in the storm drains - which are meant to carry clean rainwater off of the roads – and eventually flow directly into our creeks and rivers. Pollution of creeks and other bodies of water is an issue that affects everyone. The water we swim in, canoe in and fish in can get more and more polluted with each piece of litter that is tossed onto the roadways.

In most urban areas stormwater is unable to absorb into the ground so instead we rely on storm drains to carry stormwater into nearby waterways. As a result when the rain water falls on the pavement and flows towards the storm drain it carries with it any debris and chemicals it encounters along the way. When this stormwater goes into a storm drain it directly enters creeks, rivers, lakes and the ocean. Stormwater receives no treatment before entering these bodies of water, so an important way to improve water quality is to help prevent stormwater pollution.

Storm drains are no place to dump materials, and it is our responsibility to control what enters a storm drain. The only thing that is meant to go into the storm drains is excess water. Dumping used motor oil, paint, pesticides or any other substance into a storm drain is the same as dumping those substances into a creek or other waterway.

Pollution has a dangerous effect on creeks and wildlife. Creeks are vital to fish, wildlife, recreational use and drinking water supplies. Pollution greatly upsets the ecosystem of a creek. It is important to understand where much of the pollution in our waterways originates. It originates with – guess who? – us! Anything we spill, drop, or throw on the ground can enter a creek or river. For example, excessive use of fertilizers allows some of the fertilizers to reach streams which can cause algae blooms that remove oxygen from the water and create an environment where fish and other organisms can not survive. Trash in the waterways also poses threats to wildlife. Debris such as plastic bags, water bottles, six pack rings, and cigarette butts can suffocate or disable animals inhabiting the area. It is very important that such debris does not enter storm drains. Realize that trash left in streets or driveways will likely end up in a storm drain. Make sure to dispose of trash properly.

There are many ways that YOU can prevent stormwater pollution. Everyone can help and it can be as simple as:

- Using pesticides and fertilizers sparingly
- Join or organize a community clean up to help protect your neighborhood creeks
- Don't litter. Keep trash in the garbage and always recycle. Make sure garbage isn't left on the ground.
- Clean up after pets
- Recycle used motor oil. DO NOT dump oil onto ground or in storm drain

- Become involved in watershed protection. There are many groups that offer opportunities for ongoing involvement in waterway cleanup
- Always put cigarettes in an ashtray
- Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle whenever possible
- Sweep driveways rather than hosing them down. Using a hose can wash debris and pollutants into the storm drain.

The public is invited to join us at RRWA's Board of Directors meetings held at the Windsor Town Hall. For more information regarding the Russian River Watershed Association, as well as the dates and locations of future meetings please visit the website at www.rrwatershed.org, call us at (707) 833-2553.

RRWA is: the City of Cloverdale, City of Cotati, City of Healdsburg, City of Rohnert Park, City of Santa Rosa, City of Ukiah, County of Sonoma, Mendocino County Water Agency, Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission, Sonoma County Water Agency, and Town of Windsor.