



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – Oct 2009

Preparing for the Rainy Season

It's autumn and time to prepare for the rainy season and winter. At this time of year, you might be starting to think about raking up leaves, cleaning out your rain-gutters, and undertaking some car maintenance like replacing wiper blades and changing the anti-freeze. In conjunction with these types of activities, there are a few simple tasks we can do at home and work to protect our local creeks and the quality of our wonderful environment.

With the coming rains anything we spill, drop, throw, or intentionally store on the ground can be washed off by storm water and enter a creek or river. Polluted runoff can come from a variety of sources - oil and grease from pavement; trash and pet waste from our yards or parks; fertilizers and pesticides from lawns or gardens; sediment from construction activities; and improperly stored loose materials like garden mulch or topsoil. This pollution can have a toxic effect on fish and wildlife.

Here are some ways that you can help reduce the flow of pollution into our waterways by making your home or business "rainy season ready", supporting ongoing efforts to improve the health of our creeks:

Home and Garden

- Clean up pet waste and dispose of it in your trash container.
- Pick up leaf litter and yard clippings around your home. Use a broom to sweep your driveway and the gutter in front of your house, never rinse with a hose. Compost or recycle debris in City/County-issued garden waste containers.
- If you store garden products like soil, mulch, or compost; or if you store gas-powered garden equipment or chemicals outside, make sure you securely cover these items before it starts to rain.
- Minimize your use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers and avoid applying these chemicals if rain is in the forecast.
- Turn down your irrigation system run times during dry periods of the fall months, and turn your system off once the winter rains begin. Even during dry periods of the winter months, plants need little or no water.
- Fix car and gas-powered engine leaks. Oil, antifreeze and other harmful chemicals can drip onto streets, parking lots and driveways and then wash off into creeks.
- Commercial car washes recycle their water and keep soapy water out of the storm drain. If you wash your car at home, do it on the lawn. Rinse with a sponge, squeezing the soapy water into a bucket for disposal in the sink.



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- Clean out your pickup truck bed and properly secure items that you are hauling in your truck or on top of your car. Random trash left in the back of your pickup can easily blow out onto the street and end up in the creek.
- Motor oil, antifreeze, paint, paint thinner, batteries and chemical cleaning products should only be disposed of at a household hazardous waste collection facility. See www.recyclenow.org or call the Sonoma County Eco Desk (707 565-DESK (3375)) for more information.

Businesses can use many of the same good housekeeping practices for the home as well as these:

- Cover toxic materials with tight-fitting lids and/or store them indoors.
- Check your dumpster for leaks and ask for a replacement if necessary.
- Schedule a sweeper to clean your parking lot before the rains begin.
- Sweep—don't hose or wash dirt and debris from sidewalks and walkways.
- Train employees to use storm water pollution prevention practices such as cleaning up spills immediately.

A good rule of thumb to remember is "Only rain down the storm-drain" as almost everything else can become a pollutant. The damage can impact our creeks and our health. It costs less to prevent pollution than to clean up the creeks. Let's all do our part!

This article was authored by Forest Frasier of the City of Santa Rosa on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement