



SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN WATERSHEDS TRUST, INC.
Sweet Water

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contact: Kate Morgan –

414.416.6509, kmorgan@1kfriends.org

Help Keep Our Rivers and Lake Michigan Clean

It's finally spring in SE Wisconsin and time for many of us to tackle some of those spring jobs. It seems everywhere you look, there's some work to be done. Do you plan to clean out the garage, basement, or the house of unwanted items? Maybe it's time to give the car a good wash and wax? And then maybe there's the yard and garden waiting for your attention. Did you know that how you tackle many of these jobs have a direct affect on the water quality of our rivers and streams?

What we do and what we don't do has an effect on the health of our rivers and streams. "Most of us think what we can do as individuals doesn't matter, but when you combine the small actions of many people all across the area watershed, small individual changes can have big impacts in reducing stormwater pollution," asserted Jeff Martinka, Executive Director of Sweet Water. He added, "We each can help promote water quality by remembering that what we do in, on, and around our homes has a big effect on water quality."

Where are you disposing of old unwanted engine oil, house paint, and cleansers after you clean out your garage or basement? Don't pour these substances down a basement drain or storm drain where it's carried untreated to a nearby river. Take all these unwanted substances to hazardous waste drop-off sites.

When you're ready to wash off that winter grime make your car shine, where are you washing it? Your answer can have an impact on water quality. If you wash your car in your driveway or street, the soapy water travels down the storm sewer to our rivers where the phosphates in the cleansers make our waters green with algae. Wash your car on the lawn so the soapy water seeps into the ground or take it to your local car wash where the waste water is piped to the sewer system for treatment.

Are you trying to get a jump start on greening your grass and ready to apply early applications of fertilizers? If so, are you giving your lawn what it needs or giving it an extra dose of fertilizers for good measure? Fertilizers are washed off your yard with the spring rain and yes, down they flow into the storm sewer and on to the rivers making our rivers green as well as your yard. So apply sparingly and with thought to the weather.

Or maybe you decided to get rid of some of that green grass and put in extra gardens not only for their beauty but because garden areas absorb more rainfall than grassy lawns? Are you planning new trees? Trees can help to capture and hold water making the ground more permeable with their roots and slowing the fall of rain and helping the water infiltrate into the ground.

Getting ready to head off to your favorite garden center for plants? Explore the option of putting in a rain garden to help capture and slow the flow of rainwater from your home to the storm drain; or disconnecting a downspout



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from the storm drain to redirect to that new rain garden; or redirecting gutters into a rain barrel to store the rain for use at a later time? Rain barrels and rain gardens help to keep that first flush of stormwater from your roof out of the storm sewers helping to keep the system from overloading.

Cleaning out winter cold and flu medicines? Where are you disposing of those items? Not down the drain we hope! When poured down the drain or flushed down the toilet, it travels right into our rivers and streams. Many police stations in Milwaukee County are participating in medicine drop-off programs and MMSD and neighboring counties have special medicine collection drop-off days that help keep unwanted medicines out of our rivers as well as out of hands of curious children and youth.

The health of our waters mirrors what we do on the land and how we use water in our everyday lives. So keep this in mind this spring as you go about your various jobs in and around the house. And when you stop to quench your thirst with a tall glass of water, you can know you are doing your part.

More information on what you can do to help our rivers and Lake Michigan, visit: www.swwtwater.org.

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Sweet Water, the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, is a nonprofit organization created in 2008 as a partnership of local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, academia, and individuals working collectively to improve the water resources in the 1,100 square miles of Greater Milwaukee Watersheds.

For more information on Sweet Water, visit www.swwtwater.org or contact Jeff Martinka, Executive Director, at 414-382-1766 or via martinka@swwtwater.org.

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