

MAKE YOUR HOME A



JANIS A. BOBRIN
WASHTENAW COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONER

What is a RiverSafe Home?

The RiverSafe Home Program gives you an opportunity to identify water quality protection activities that you do well and consistently around your home. It also provides an opportunity to commit to other proactive and “easy to do” pollution preventing activities that you may not have considered before.



How does the RiverSafe Home Program Work?

Homeowners complete a user-friendly single-page online survey after reviewing the brief descriptions of the categories of questions in the survey that include:

- Home Toxics Use and Disposal
- Yard Care and Outdoor Housekeeping
- Vehicle Care
- Pets and Urban Wildlife Waste

A RiverSafe home can display a “RiverSafe Home” plaque furnished by the Drain Commissioner’s Office upon satisfactory completion of the RiverSafe Home survey.

So, who is polluting stormwater around their homes, anyway? Why be concerned?

Stormwater may carry pollutants from commonly used household products like fertilizers, pesticides, solvents, soaps and cleaners, paints and finishes, and car maintenance products like oil, antifreeze and petroleum based cleaners. Pet and wildlife waste are also a concern as they find their way into stormwater runoff. These are just a few examples of potential pollutants when products like these are used or handled improperly, or when we don't "pick up" after our pets.

The cumulative amounts of pollution generated from each household can be very significant. Consider these examples:

- In 2001, U.S. homeowners purchased approximately 102 million pounds of lawn and garden pesticides. (USEPA)
- U.S. Homeowners spend 5 billion dollars annually to fertilize 30 million acres of lawn. (www.greenguide.com)
- 5,000 tons of dog waste are produced daily in the United States.

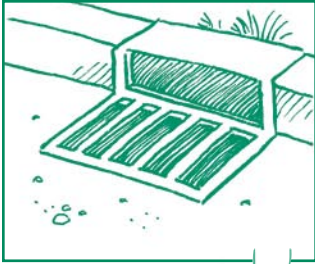
The everyday actions that each homeowner takes now or is willing to take in the future to protect water quality can make a big difference.

A personal commitment to reduce stormwater pollution in Washtenaw County starts at your house!



Keep in mind that stormwater leaving your property may flow to a:

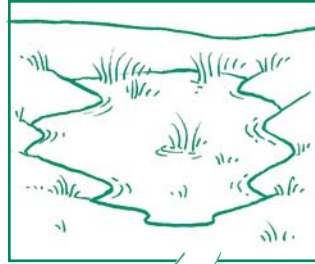
Catchbasin



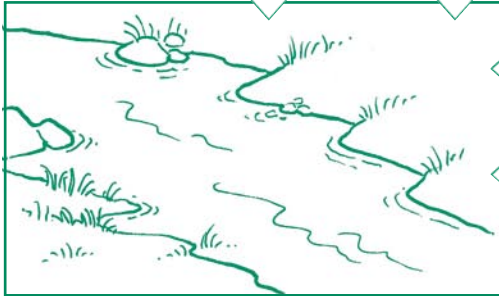
Grassy Swale



Stormwater Pond



Creek



or River – the ultimate destination of stormwater!

But no matter where it “goes,” not a drop of that stormwater is treated in any way to remove pollutants, so whatever you can do to prevent polluting stormwater on your property is a valuable personal contribution to protecting water quality.

So now that you have decided to improve water quality at your house, let's get started!

Here are the topics that are covered in the survey to make your home a RiverSafe Home:



Home Toxics



Yard Care and Outdoor
Housekeeping



Car and Vehicle Care



Pet and Urban Wildlife
Waste Disposal



Go no further until you read this stuff!

Here's a little more information to get you thinking when you complete the survey:



Home Toxics:

- Buy what you need – storing large containers promotes overuse and possible spills.
- Follow directions on the label – more isn't better!
- Choose a safer product – many less toxic alternatives work just as well. See <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>.
- Don't "flush" leftover prescription drugs into the toilet. For more information about proper disposal, check the Washtenaw County Home Toxics Program at <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>, or contact the Drain Commissioner's Office at 734-222-6860 or <http://drain.ewashtenaw.org>.
- Dispose of all leftover or unused toxics at a HHW collection facility. For more information contact the Washtenaw County Home Toxics Program at <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>. You may also call your local government for information about Household Hazardous Waste collection days.

Yard Care and Outdoor Housekeeping

- Soil test to see if you need to fertilize your lawn – most lawns need only one fertilizer application per year – some don't need any. Soil testing will give you the information and may save you money in the bargain. For more on soil testing, contact the MSU extension at 734-997-1678 or www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/extension/ex_extsoil.html.
- Mow the lawn between 2.5” and 3.5” high to save water, keep pests away and discourage weeds. Allow grass clippings to remain on the lawn – they serve as fertilizer!
- Consider planting native plants – they are hardy over Michigan winters, don't usually require fertilizer or watering. For more yard care information, see the Drain Commissioner's [Homeowner's Handbook](http://drain.ewashtenaw.org) at <http://drain.ewashtenaw.org> or call 734-222-6833 to request a copy of the Handbook.
- Go Natural – consider leaving some lawn area to grow in a natural state to eliminate lawn mowing, watering and the use of chemicals. Habitat for birds and other wildlife can be a lovely result.
- Consider installing a rain garden to manage stormwater on your site. For more information, call the Drain Commissioner's Office at 734-222-6851.





Car and Vehicle Care

- Wash your car at the car wash if possible. All water and cleaning products are recycled and then go to the waste water treatment plant.
- If you wash your car at home, park it on the lawn, and use plain water – less soap and solvents end up in a catchbasin or swale. At the very least, use a “safer” soap.
- Capture used oil and antifreeze from maintenance activities and take leftovers to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection facility. For more information visit <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org> or call your local government about Household Hazardous Waste Collection days.
- Got a vehicle leak? Repair it pronto! Even small amounts of petroleum products are a big threat to water quality. Antifreeze is poisonous to children and pets.

Pet and Urban Wildlife Waste

- If you walk your dog, carry plastic bags to pick up after your pet each time. Dispose of the waste in the household trash. If your dog routinely uses your yard, perform regular cleanup of waste and dispose of the waste in the trash.
- Keep a lid secured on your trash container. Consider putting your trash to the curb early in the morning of trash day instead. Wildlife is attracted to trash bins and also deposit their waste nearby. Increasing amounts of wild animal wastes are being detected in stormwater drainage systems.
- Don't leave pet food outside for extended periods or overnight to discourage wild animals from frequenting your property and then depositing waste.

There are many other topics that relate to water quality protection around the home. For more information, see [Homeowners Guide](#); or call the Drain Commissioner's Office for more information and a list of other topics.

That's it! Now it's time to complete the RiverSafe Home Survey.



What Happens Next

Once you have completed the survey and have replied in the affirmative to each question by answering “already do” or “commit to do” we will send you the “RiverSafe Home” marker that you have chosen at the top of the survey page. Please be sure to complete the name and address section of the survey so your RiverSafe Home marker can be mailed to you. Provide your e-mail address on the survey to receive occasional environmental information.

The RiverSafe Home markers are shown below to help you decide which design would look great near your front door, on a porch step riser, or another location that would be just right.

[Click here to take the Riversafe Home survey!](#)



Janis A. Bobrin
Washtenaw County
Drain Commissioner

705 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48107
734-222-6860

<http://drain.ewashtenaw.org>



Illustrations by David Zinn