

# YOU CAN HELP!

## Lawns and Gardens

- Fertilize only when necessary with a phosphorus-free fertilizer such as the Lake Whatcom Blend.
- Reduce the amount of grass in your landscape. Try native ground covers that require less mowing and fertilizer. Soil covered with plants acts like a natural sponge and filter, slowing down runoff and reducing the amount of pollutants that can reach the lake.
- Plant or leave vegetated buffers along streams, ditches, and lakeside property. If the property has been cleared, replant with native plants.

## Your Car

- Take your car to a commercial car wash that recycles the water and then sends it to the wastewater treatment plant.
- If you must wash your car at home, wash it with phosphorus-free products on a pervious (porous) surface such as a lawn or a gravel driveway.
- Reduce car trips in and out of the watershed by combining errands, carpooling, walking, using public transportation, or riding a bike.

## Waste

- Have your septic tank inspected and pumped every 3 to 5 years.
- Scoop the poop! Don't leave pet waste to decompose. Carry a bag or look for Mutt Mitt stations along the trails.

## Soaps and Detergents

- When using soap or detergents outdoors make sure to use phosphorus-free products on a porous surface.



City of Bellingham  
210 Lottie Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225

PRSRRT STD  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
BELLINGHAM WA  
PERMIT NO. 30

### CONTACT:

Whatcom County Water Resources 360-676-6876  
City of Bellingham Environmental Resources 360-676-6961  
Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District 360-734-9224  
[www.lakewhatcom.wsu.edu](http://www.lakewhatcom.wsu.edu)



# Protect Your Drinking Water

## Phosphorus



A PARTNERSHIP OF WHATCOM COUNTY  
CITY OF BELLINGHAM  
LAKE WHATCOM WATER & SEWER DISTRICT

# Protect Your Drinking Water



## Phosphorus

is a naturally occurring nutrient found in water, soil, and air. It helps stimulate plant growth and is essential for animal and plant life. You may recognize it as a common ingredient in fertilizers.

### Too Much of a Good Thing

Naturally balanced levels of phosphorus promote natural levels of growth. Human activities are increasing phosphorus levels in the lake. When excess amounts of phosphorus are introduced into a waterway some plant species, such as algae, experience explosive growth. Overgrowth of algae clouds water, blocking sunlight from other plants and aquatic life, killing them or limiting their growth.

When algae die, they sink to the bottom of the lake and begin to decompose. Bacteria feed on the decomposing algae and consume oxygen in the water. This process can deplete oxygen levels in the lake to a level that is too low to support plant and animal life. In addition, dead algae creates more nutrients to fertilize even more algal growth, accelerating the depletion of oxygen in the lake.

### Where Does Phosphorus Come From?

Sources of phosphorus from our neighborhoods and homes include:

- Lawn fertilizers
- Leaves and grass clippings
- Pesticides
- Exposed soil from construction and landscaping
- Pet and wildlife droppings
- Failing septic systems
- Automobile exhaust and car washing
- Phosphorus-based soaps, detergents, and chemicals



### How Does Phosphorus Get into Lakes?

Phosphorus is carried into the lake by run-off from rain-water or outdoor water use. Land clearing exposes soil, allowing it to be washed away by rain. Hard or impervious surfaces, such as roads, rooftops and patios, allow water to run off quickly and carry phosphorus-containing pollutants, such as motor oils, fuels, and detergents, directly into lakes and streams or into storm drains that lead to the nearest lake or stream.



### It's the law

No person shall apply any commercial fertilizer to residential lawns or public properties within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, either liquid or granular, that is labeled as containing more than 0% phosphorus or other compounds containing phosphorus, such as phosphate, except when applied to newly established turf or lawn areas in the first growing season.

No commercial fertilizer of any type shall be applied when the ground is frozen.

No person shall apply, spill, or otherwise deposit commercial fertilizer on impervious surfaces. Any fertilizer applied, spilled or deposited, either intentionally or accidentally, on impervious surfaces shall be immediately and completely removed.

City of Bellingham Ordinance 2005-06-044  
Whatcom County Ordinance 2005-038

# Protect Your Drinking Water