

# Q&A

## COMMUNITY CLEAN-UPS FOR WATER QUALITY

### What are Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality?

Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality are local projects that prevent water pollution. Any person, group or organization can participate in a clean-up. Previous clean-ups have been conducted by Boy Scouts, church groups, students as part of science projects, school clubs, conservation organizations, corporations and other civic organizations. Volunteers rake, sweep, bag and remove loose dirt and leaves blocking sewer grates on city streets. The material is then composted to prevent excessive nutrients such as phosphorus from entering lakes, rivers and streams.

### Why are Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality important?

Rainstorms and snowmelt wash leaves and loose dirt into our stormwater systems and into our lakes, rivers and streams. As the material decays, phosphorus enters waterways and pollutes lakes, rivers and streams by causing excessive growth of aquatic plants such as algae which decrease oxygen levels in the water and contribute to unhealthy conditions for fish and other aquatic organisms. By cleaning up organic materials from yards in the spring and fall, a community can significantly reduce pollution. Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality play an important role in removing phosphorus from water bodies. Stormwater runoff is a leading cause of the water quality problems in our lakes, rivers and streams. Currently, 40% of

our water bodies are polluted, threatening our use of those waters for fishing and swimming. This is a locally led community pollution prevention project that helps to begin the process of reclaiming our lakes, rivers and streams.

Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality also help meet the requirements of municipal stormwater programs by providing valuable public education and outreach and engaging citizens to participate in stormwater pollution problems. Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality make good economic sense as well.

### How are Clean-Ups conducted?

Community Clean-Ups for Water Quality are fun, cost-effective and produce measurable results. There has been much success since this program was instituted in 2003 in the Minnesota River Watershed by the Friends of the Minnesota Valley. In October 2012, some 27,000 Girl Scouts, parents and adult volunteers conducted a massive Community Clean-Up for Water Quality in Minnesota and parts of Wisconsin. Girls from the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys council raked and bagged 2 million pounds of leaves, soil and organic debris from streets, parks and other public spaces.

Their work helped fight the nutrient-fed excess algae growth that often chokes surface waters in urban areas. The Scouts also stenciled 7,000 storm sewers with anti-pollution messages, such as: "Please Don't Pollute. Drains To Mississippi River."

### How do we begin?

Community Clean-Ups are usually scheduled in April, but can also be scheduled in October or November. Join with friends, neighborhood groups or organizations to sponsor a Community Clean-Up for Water Quality in your neighborhood. It's easy—all you need are gloves, rakes, brooms, shovels and bags to clean up the debris. Start by scheduling a Community Clean-Up Day and



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contacting your local city, park or maintenance department. Notify other community members so they can participate by individually cleaning areas in front of their homes, recording the number of bags and taking them to the compost site or placing them on the boulevard for pickup on your specific day.

We can all help by keeping our streets clean of leaves and other materials by raking or sweeping during the growing season, but especially during spring and fall. Leaves can be used as mulch in other areas of the landscape or composted to benefit soil health in the future. If we remove leaves and debris from in front of each of our homes we can contribute to cleaner runoff and ultimately cleaner water entering our lakes, rivers and streams.



### Doesn't street sweeping pick up all the leaves and trash?

The goal of these clean-ups is to catch the winter's accumulation of decaying leaves and other organic material before spring rains wash it through the sewers to lakes and streams. Fall clean-ups are also helpful because leaves are removed before they begin to decay. Many streets may not be swept by city crews until after the first significant spring rainfall. Plan your clean-up before street sweeping occurs.

### How will this help our lakes, rivers and streams?

Stormwater runoff, the water that flows off streets, buildings, parking lots, lawns and other surfaces is a serious problem for Minnesota lakes and rivers. Your community can make a significant impact on pollution coming from your streets and improve the health of your lakes, rivers and streams. To learn more, go to [www.freshwater.org](http://www.freshwater.org) and search for What is Polluting Our Lakes.

### What else can I do to fight phosphorus pollution?

Your street is a tributary to your local lake or river.

- Rake and sweep street curbs BEFORE spring rains wash debris into sewers and participate in your annual Community Clean-Up Day.
- Rake fall leaves before the first snowfall.
- Always mow away from the street.
- Sweep fertilizers off sidewalks and driveways.

Joining this effort will not only help prevent water pollution in your community today, but will help spread the word and model behavior to keep lakes and rivers clean for generations to come.

For more information contact the Freshwater Society at 952-471-9773 or [freshwater@freshwater.org](mailto:freshwater@freshwater.org).