



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Puget Sound Starts Here?

Puget Sound Starts Here is a partnership of regional governments dedicated to improving water quality in Puget Sound and local lakes, rivers and streams. The program is composed of 57 cities and counties collectively known as S.T.O.R.M (Stormwater Outreach for Regional Municipalities), Washington State Puget Sound Partnership and Washington State Department of Ecology. The program is designed to harness collective energies to help save Puget Sound from a precipitous death by reducing the amount of stormwater pollution that eventually ends up in the Sound.

What can people do to participate in Puget Sound Starts Here?

Here are some simple steps every resident can take to make Puget Sound healthier.

- **In the Yard:** Use fertilizers and pesticides sparingly, or use compost instead.
- **With the Car:** Use a commercial car wash and have fluid leaks repaired.
- **Around Pets:** Use a bag to pick up pet poop and place it in the trash (not in the yard waste bin).
- **Home and More:** From cleaning products to septic maintenance, be aware of home care practices.

How is Puget Sound in trouble?

The Puget Sound region extends from the crest of the Cascades and the Olympics to the waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Hood Canal. Stormwater pollution carried into bodies of water within the Puget Sound region has a negative impact on the health of those waters and the animals that live in them. Government is regulating industry, but the biggest challenges are problems created by individual residents – in yards, with cars and around pets.

What is the problem?

- On an average day, it's estimated that 140,000 pounds of toxic chemicals – including petroleum, copper, lead, zinc, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) – enter Puget Sound.
- About 75% of the toxic chemicals getting to the Sound are carried by stormwater that runs off paved roads and driveways, rooftops, yards and other developed land.
- 549 streams, rivers and lakes across the Puget Sound region suffer from poor water quality.
- Transient and southern resident orcas are considered to be among the most PCB-contaminated mammals on the planet.
- Harbor seals in Puget Sound are seven times more contaminated with the persistent toxic chemicals known as PCBs than those living in Canada's Strait of Georgia, which adjoins the Sound.

Where does the problem start?

- The Puget Sound region is a large watershed comprised of many different watersheds. A watershed is an area that drains into a body of water through a network of streams, rivers, storm drains and underground pipes. In a watershed, many different sources contribute to stormwater runoff pollution. The pollution starts locally – whether in Kirkland, Bremerton or Tacoma – and runs through in-city watersheds impairing many bodies of water.

**What is stormwater runoff?**

Throughout most of the Puget Sound region, stormwater drains and sewer systems are not connected. Stormwater is rain that is not absorbed into the soil. It runs over paved and developed surfaces (including lawns) and flows into storm drains. These storm drains do not lead to treatment plants, but instead discharge untreated, polluted stormwater directly into natural waterways such as lakes, rivers, streams, ponds and Puget Sound.

What pollutants does stormwater contain?

Stormwater can contain many pollutants. These include antifreeze, brake fluid, brake pad dust, exhaust particles, oil, pavement particles, tire particles, transmission fluid, fertilizers, weed killers, pesticides, and bacteria from dog waste and broken septic systems.

How does this problem affect me?

Four million people call the Puget Sound region home. Eating shellfish and salmon from the Sound or swimming in its waters means residents risk exposing themselves to highly toxic chemicals. Many contaminants that are harmful to Puget Sound are harmful to people as well.

What is the problem with automobile leaks?

Although automobile oil leaks are only one source of the problem in Puget Sound, they are indeed a serious issue. When it rains, stormwater runoff collects oil trapped on impervious surfaces such as asphalt and pavement, and much of this polluted runoff ends up in the Sound. The toxic compounds contained in oil have a deadly effect on most marine life.

Why is car washing at home a bad thing?

Car washing soap and the vehicle-related pollutants that bind with it are the problems. At home, the wash water and soap used on a car go right into the storm drain. Oil, zinc, lead, copper and other compounds are washed off your car and down the storm drain as well. These compounds, along with the surfactants found in all soaps, have chronic and acute impacts on aquatic wildlife.

How does fertilizer affect waterways?

Nutrients such as the phosphates and nitrates found in yard fertilizers can kill plants and animals. They feed the excessive growth of algae, which uses up oxygen needed for fish and other aquatic life.

What is the problem with pet waste?

Pet waste is raw sewage. It contains hazardous organisms that cause bacterial contamination in local streams, rivers and lakes. When it rains, bacteria in dog poop is carried by stormwater runoff to storm drains, ditches and streams that feed local rivers, lakes and Puget Sound. Dog waste contains fecal coliform bacteria and other disease-causing organisms such as salmonella, roundworms and giardia. These bacteria can make water unsafe to drink or swim in.