

# ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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## Clean Drinking Water: It's Up to You!

### Why do you need to help protect drinking water?

Your drinking water comes from a groundwater or surface water source, both of which can be vulnerable to contamination from routine household activities. As water flows through the watershed, it can pick up contamination along the way. While some pollutants can be filtered out by soil, groundwater can be easily contaminated by a variety of chemicals. Surface water can be contaminated by soil erosion and pollutants picked up as water flows over land. A little bit of pollution can affect a lot of water.

To access an electronic version of this fact sheet (with live links), use this QR code.



### What can you do to help prevent contamination of drinking water sources?

- **Dispose of Waste Properly**
  - Visit the [NHDES "Managing My Waste" website](#) for information on how to dispose of different types of household waste.
  - Utilize [household hazardous waste](#) collection days to dispose of hazardous wastes, such as pesticides, herbicides, fertilizer, batteries, cleaning fluids, paint thinners and thermometers.
  - Recycle used motor oil at a municipal solid waste transfer station that accepts [used oil](#).
  - Dispose of unused medicine properly; do not flush it down the toilet. Police Departments throughout the state have implemented a [prescription drug drop box program](#).
- **Use Safer Chemicals at Home, Work and School**
  - Consider switching to [non-toxic and less-toxic alternatives to traditional household chemicals](#), some of which may inadvertently contain chemicals like [PFAS](#).
  - There are [simple recipes](#) for kitchen and bathroom cleaners made from things like white vinegar and baking soda that are cost-effective and environmentally friendly.
  - The [EPA Safer Choice Program](#) has a list of household and business cleaning products that use safer ingredients. [PFAS Central](#) has a list of products that are likely PFAS-free.
  - Only buy what you need—avoid buying and storing large volumes of materials that may go unused.

- The NHDES [Greening Your Home website](#) has many useful links for ways to reduce waste and improve energy efficiency.
- **Maintain Your Septic System**
  - If your house is on septic, [regular maintenance of your septic system](#), including pumping the tank out every 3 years, is essential to its ongoing performance.
  - Any soggy areas around the system, or disagreeable odors, could indicate septic system failure. Have it checked by a professional.
  - Do not dispose of any toxic materials into the system. When in doubt, don't flush it.
- **Properly Store Gasoline and Oil at Your Home**
  - Check all fuel storage tanks for leaks. If a tank is more than 20 years old, consider replacing it with an aboveground storage tank that has a concrete slab underneath it, a cover and secondary containment.
  - [NHDES Safe Tank Program](#) can provide financial assistance to upgrade or replace home heating oil tanks.
  - Perform any refueling and engine work on an impervious surface like a concrete floor. Avoid any refueling in areas near surface water or wells.
  - Keep cat litter or absorbent pads available and soak up any gas spills immediately.
  - Contact NHDES and/or your local fire department or 911 to [report any oil or gas spills](#) that may have soaked into the ground. NHDES Spill Response can be reached at [\(603\) 271-3899](#).
- **Transform and Simplify Your Lawn Care**
  - Work with nature. The [NOFA Organic Landcare guide](#) provides many useful practices and tips for a healthy lawn which protects water. [Ahora disponible en español.](#)
  - Consider reducing lawn areas or replacing them with an alternative ground cover like wildflowers and native shrubs that require less maintenance and can benefit pollinators and other wildlife.
  - [Limit lawn fertilizer and herbicide/pesticide use](#), particularly near wells, lakes, rivers and streams. All of these chemicals can negatively impact drinking water sources. A single application of slow release, low phosphate fertilizer at the beginning of fall is adequate in most cases.
  - To help protect the environment and reduce fertilization costs, have your soil tested to determine if and what types of fertilizer are needed. You can have your soil tested by the [UNH Cooperative Extension](#).
  - For the healthiest lawn, support the soil that grows your lawn by applying compost to your lawn regularly. You can make your own compost with leaves, lawn clippings and kitchen scraps.
  - Be careful refueling your lawn equipment. During refueling, be sure to place the equipment on an impervious surface, such as a concrete floor or tarp so any spills don't soak into the ground.
  - Consider using hand tools instead of gas-powered machines (e.g., a rake instead of a leaf blower). It's good exercise and good for the environment.
  - If replacing your lawn equipment, consider purchasing an electric mower or trimmer instead of a gas-powered one.
- **During the Winter, Limit Salt Use on Sidewalks and Driveways**
  - Road salt contributes elevated sodium and chloride to rivers and groundwater, which can be harmful to aquatic life and humans.
  - Consider alternative de-icing materials, such as calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) or alfalfa meal, and/or using materials like sand, sawdust or cat litter to increase traction.
  - If you use a plowing company, request that they reduce/optimize their salt use and obtain the [Green Snow Pro certification](#).

### For More Information

Please contact the Drinking Water and Groundwater Bureau at [\(603\) 271-2513](#) or [dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov](mailto:dwgbinfo@des.nh.gov) or visit our website at [www.des.nh.gov](http://www.des.nh.gov).

*Note: This fact sheet is accurate as of January 2024. Statutory or regulatory changes or the availability of additional information after this date may render this information inaccurate or incomplete.*