

Dishwashers, Lawn Mowers and Cow Manure

Dishwashers, lawn mowers and cow manure; what do these three things have in common? They are all directly, or indirectly, sources of phosphorus.

We Minnesotans love our lakes and water resources. What we don't love is green, smelly lakes and ponds covered with thick layers of oozing algae. Guess what causes algae to grow? That's right – phosphorus! When a lake has an excess of phosphorus, some species of algae begin to grow out of control. The results can be disastrous. No one likes to swim in algae, boat motors become mired in the goo, and certain species of algae can even be harmful to people and animals.



We can help keep local lakes clean by putting less phosphorus in the water. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency recently found that dishwasher detergent, grass clippings and livestock manure are common sources of phosphorus. Household and commercial dishwasher detergent, for example, contribute about 3% of all the phosphorus pollution to surface waters in Minnesota. This may not sound like much, but think how easy it would be to make our lakes cleaner simply by changing our dishwasher detergents. Look for phosphorus-free detergent the next time you are shopping. Food soils and garbage disposal waste combined contribute another 4% of the phosphorus loading. You can help by composting kitchen scraps rather than sending them down the garbage disposal.

To find out more about phosphorus and its many sources you can visit the Minnesota Pollution Control website at www.pca.state.mn.us/water/phosphorus.html.

