

## It's the Law: Lake Whatcom Ordinances

### City of Bellingham Residents (BMC 15.42.050 D)

#### Applies to Fertilizers, Mulches, and Soil Amendments on Any Property

- Don't apply any fertilizers, mulches, or soil amendments in the Lake Whatcom Watershed that are labeled as containing phosphorus.
- Don't apply when the ground is frozen.
- Don't apply on impervious surfaces. Clean spills immediately.

### Whatcom County Residents (WCC 16.32)

#### Applies to Fertilizers on Residential Lawns and Public Properties

- Don't apply any fertilizers to lawns or public properties in the Lake Whatcom Watershed that are labeled as containing phosphorus, except on newly established lawns in the first growing season.
- Don't apply when the ground is frozen.
- Don't apply on impervious surfaces. Clean spills immediately.



Puget Sound  
Starts Here.org

CONTACT:  
Whatcom County Public Works 360-778-6230  
City of Bellingham Public Works 360-778-7700  
Lake Whatcom Water and Sewer District 360-734-9224  
<http://www.lakewhatcom.whatcomcounty.org>

## STEWARDSHIP SOLUTIONS



## Protect Your Drinking Water

### Phosphorus Too Much of a Good Thing



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





# Protect Your Drinking Water

## What is phosphorus?

**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.

## Where does phosphorus come from?

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



Fertilizers, mulches and soil amendments like compost and manure can be high in phosphorus. Only use those that are labeled as 0% phosphorus. Check the label on bags or ask if bulk materials have been tested.

## How does phosphorus get into the lake?



Phosphorus is carried into the lake by runoff from rainwater or outdoor water use. Water washes over exposed soil, yards, roads and roofs, carrying pollutants down ditches and storm drains that lead to the nearest lake or stream.

## What's the problem with phosphorus in Lake Whatcom?

- Unnaturally high levels of phosphorus cause some plant species, like algae, to experience explosive growth.
- Overgrowth of algae clouds water, blocking sunlight from other plants and aquatic life, killing them or limiting their growth.
- Abundant algae cause water treatment plant filters to clog at an unusually fast rate, making it difficult to keep up with customer water demand.
- Bacteria feed on dead, decomposing algae, depleting oxygen in the water to a level that is too low to support plant and animal life.
- Dead algae create more nutrients to fertilize even more algal growth, accelerating the depletion of oxygen in the lake.



# Protect Your Drinking Water