

Phosphorus Reduction: Why it is important to take steps to reduce our phosphorus footprint.

So, you are asking yourself: “What is phosphorus and why do I care how much is going to the wastewater treatment plant?”

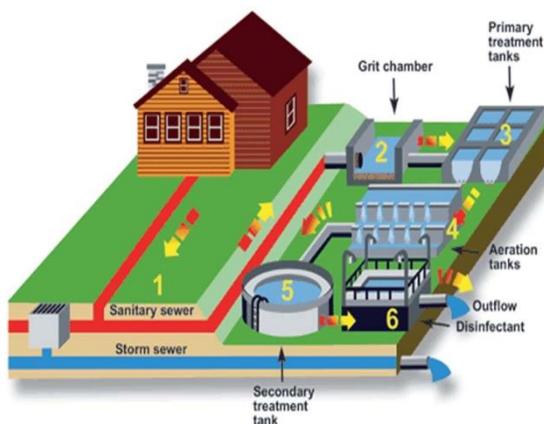
Phosphorus is an essential element for most living things. It is produced naturally by foods we ingest. It can also be found in many household detergents and cleaners we use on a daily basis, usually in the form of phosphates. There are also trace amounts of it in human waste.

Most wastewater treatment facilities discharge their treated water, called effluent, back into rivers and streams. Nutrients remaining in treated wastewater include phosphorus and can be used by algae in the water to create algae blooms. Algae blooms can block sunlight, affecting the micro bacteria and plankton in the water that smaller fish and aquatic life use as food sources. When algae blooms die off, the breakdown of the dead material uses up dissolved oxygen in the water that fish require for respiration. Algae blooms also have discernable odors and have been known to be harmful if touched.

The city’s wastewater treatment facility does remove phosphorus found in the water it treats from the sewers. Some of it is removed biologically, but the majority of it removed with the use of chemicals. Chemical and biological treatment can only remove so much phosphorus, and some will remain in the treated water discharge into Springbrook. Wastewater treatment is costly, so we should all be mindful of what is placed down our drains. Reducing what we allow down our drains helps keep treatment costs down. It also reduces our environmental impact on the river for the birds and animals that call it home and for our recreational use.

We can all take steps to reduce the amount of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds by being mindful of what is dumped down the drains in our homes.

- ❖ Choose low and non-phosphate detergents, soaps and household cleaners. By reducing the amount of phosphate cleaners and detergents, you are reducing the amount of phosphorus and phosphates that the wastewater treatment facility has to treat. You are also helping the streams and rivers by reducing the amount of phosphorus discharged into the waters.
- ❖ Reduce your detergent amounts. Many people use too much soap and detergents. Sometimes lesser amounts will do the job as much more. Using less detergents and soaps is also a budget friendly option.
- ❖ Try to minimize the amount of food scraps going down the sink drain and garbage disposal. Many foods contain high amounts of phosphorus. Place food scraps in the garbage if all possible. Composting is also environmentally friendly.



Phosphorus also comes from storm water runoff, which is not treated. Be mindful of the chemicals we use for washing cars or cleaning outside the house. Be careful to not over feed with lawn fertilizers as many of these contain phosphates. Like detergents, there are phosphate free fertilizers available at your local stores.