

Earth Matters

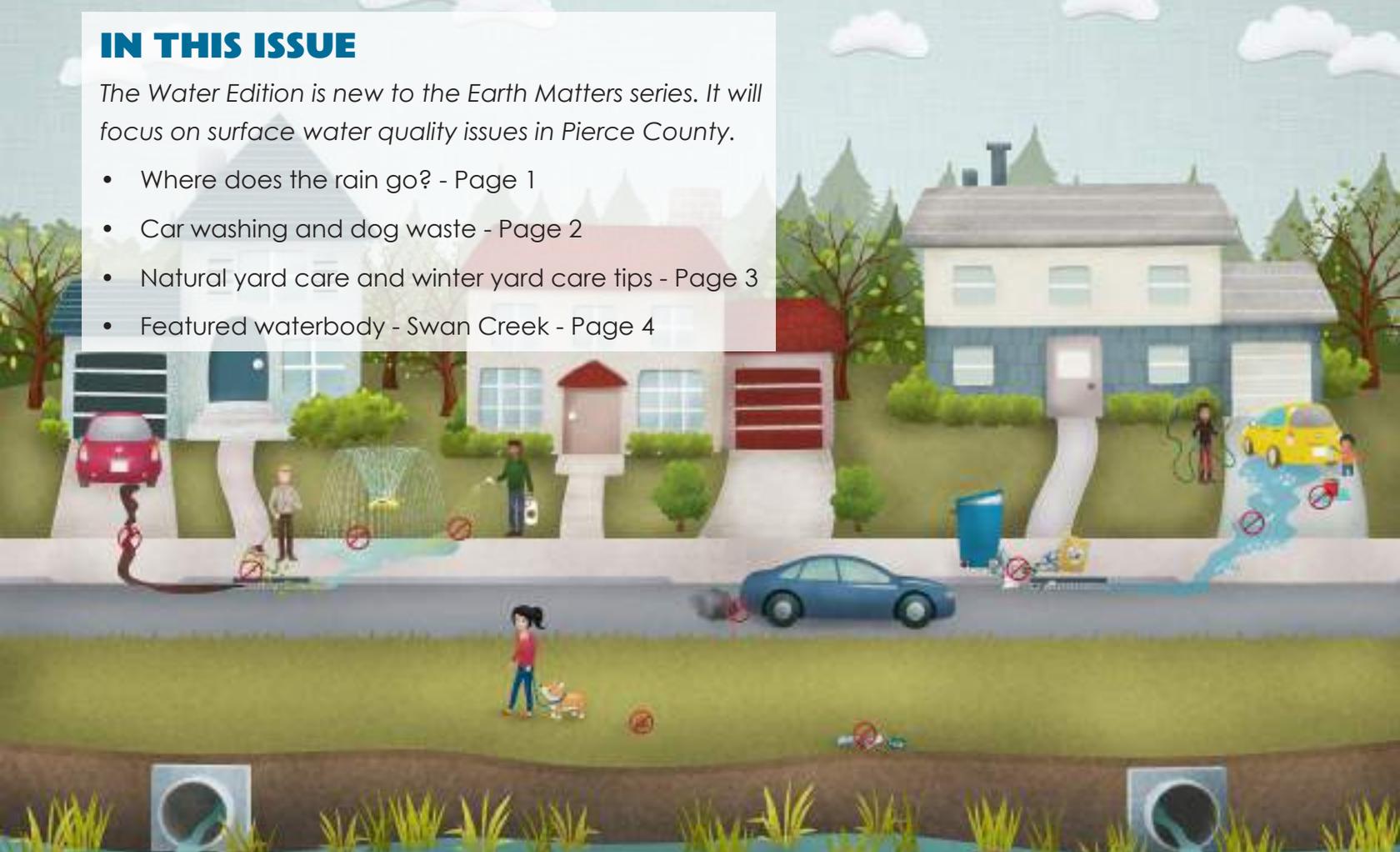
THE WATER EDITION

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS FROM PIERCE COUNTY

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The Water Edition is new to the Earth Matters series. It will focus on surface water quality issues in Pierce County.

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WHERE DOES THE RAIN GO?

What happens to a drop of rain when it falls on the ground? It may land on a rooftop, driveway or road and travel down the street into a storm drain, ditch or stream. Rain that does not evaporate or soak into the ground runs over the land becoming "stormwater runoff." This runoff is one of the leading sources of pollution in Puget Sound and local waterways. When water runs over the ground, it picks up things from our cars like oil and brake dust and from our yards like fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste and other chemicals. Stormwater runoff is generally not treated before it flows into local streams, lakes, rivers and Puget Sound.

CAR WASHING

Is your organization considering hosting a fundraising car wash in 2016? Instead, consider a fundraising alternative like selling car wash tickets, or asking a local car wash to donate a bay for the day. For fundraising alternatives, go to piercecountywa.org/CarWash.

Charity car washes can be a major source of pollution in our waterways. They discharge huge amounts of dirty water including soap, dirt, oils, heavy metals and more from the cars that are washed. That dirty water often drains into the public stormwater system and flows, generally without treatment, to rivers, streams, lakes and Puget Sound.

Even at home, car washing can cause pollution. Consider washing your car on grass or gravel where water can soak into the ground, or just take it to a commercial car wash. Commercial car washes are required to discharge their wastewater to the sewer system or provide treatment.



DOG WASTE

Dog waste can be a health risk to people, especially children. It is full of bacteria that can make people sick. If it is washed through storm drains and into a lake, stream or Puget Sound, the bacteria can end up in fish and shellfish. People who eat contaminated shellfish or drink contaminated water can get sick. Whether you're at home or on a walk, always bag your dog waste and throw it in the trash. For more facts about dog waste, visit ScoopPoop.org.



Does your neighborhood have a dog waste problem in a community park or along a walking path? Pierce County has a program that provides free neighborhood dog waste stations. You can apply to adopt a station for your neighborhood at piercecountywa.org/DogWasteStation.

NATURAL YARD CARE FOR CLEAN WATER



Our yards are our outdoor homes: fun, beautiful, great spaces for relaxing. But in taking care of them, we often use water inefficiently, produce a lot of yard waste and overuse chemicals that are bad for the environment and could be harmful to people and pets. The good news is that by using natural yard care methods, like cutting down on chemicals, you can make your yard beautiful and healthier for your family. Visit naturalyardcare.info for information and resources about natural methods.

TIPS FOR WINTER AND SPRING

1 Sharpen your lawnmower blade before the grass starts growing to keep your lawn healthy.



2 Prune in winter before you see signs of new growth for full and healthy trees and shrubs.



3 Mulch flower beds to reduce weed growth and retain moisture during the growing season.



4 Plant in the spring, just after the last frost, to take advantage of the rain. This helps plants get established before the dry season.

Did you know that you have a free and reliable source of yard care tips and tricks just a phone call or email away? Pierce County Master Gardeners can help you solve your yard care problems and provide natural yard care tips. Call the Master Gardener's gardening hotline at (253) 798-7170 or email pierce.mg@wsu.edu.

Looking for more resources? Try one of these websites for a listing of local gardening classes:

- Master Gardeners, piercemg.wsu.edu
- Pierce County Edible Gardens workshops, piercecountywa.org/EdibleGardens
- Tacoma EnviroHouse, cityoftacoma.org/envirohouse

Report Water Pollution

Emergency Situations

If the pollution is a severe threat to human health or the environment, such as hazardous waste, gasoline or chemical spills, call 911.

Non-emergency spills in rivers, creeks, lakes or Puget Sound

Report spills to the Washington State Department of Ecology at (360) 407-6300

Non-emergency spills in a storm drain, stormwater pond, ditch or other drainage system

Call Surface Water Management at (253) 798-4274

If the problem you are reporting is within a city or town, call that city or town to report it.

Commonly reported spills include foam, sewage, paint and oily sheens.



Pierce County

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FEATURED STREAM: SWAN CREEK

High pollution levels in Swan Creek have been identified by Pierce County's monitoring team. The creek begins south of SR 512 near Waller Road and flows north to the Puyallup River. High levels of fecal coliform bacteria, nitrogen, phosphorus and high sediment loads were found in the creek. These pollution problems are typical for streams with a lot of nearby development. The Swan Creek Watershed Characterization Study recommended stormwater filtration and water flow reduction projects to reduce pollution and erosion in the stream. More information about Swan Creek is at piercecountywa.org/SwanRTG.



Simple steps residents can take to protect water quality in streams:

- Keep farm animals and their waste away from streams.
- Plant trees and native vegetation along the creek.
- Reduce the use of yard care chemicals, especially fertilizer.
- Have your septic system inspected regularly.