



JEFFCO H₂O NEWS

ISSUE 37 - FALL / WINTER 2021

In this issue:

- ◇ Fix a Leak, Protect a Creek
- ◇ What's Happening?
- ◇ Old as Dirt
- ◇ Return of the Fatbergs!
- ◇ Upcycled Décor

Fix a Leak, Protect a Creek



For most of us, owning or having use of a vehicle is vital to being able to get to work, school, shopping, doctor visits, and other necessary activities. It's no secret that properly maintaining vehicles is an ongoing and sometimes expensive responsibility. Regular maintenance is important to the vehicle functioning in a way that allows it to operate with maximum efficiency while reducing the amount of pollutants it emits. In spite of regular maintenance, vehicles still can contribute to stormwater pollution. Even though many people take their cars to a commercial facility for oil changes, there still is potential for vehicle fluids from your car to leak or drip. If you park your car in the driveway, in a parking lot, or on the street, check for any motor oil or other fluid leaks. These leaks are usually obvious by the dark oily spots they create when they drip on paved surfaces. Placing a drip cloth or pan under the vehicle to catch the drips can buy a little time until you can get it fixed. Use an [absorbent material](#) to clean up anything that leaked onto the paved surface. Sweep up the absorbent material and dispose of it in the trash; never hose down a vehicle fluid drip or spill. If allowed to remain on the ground, even these small amounts of motor oil and other vehicle fluids can be washed away by stormwater and carried into a creek or stream. Oil and petroleum

products do not dissolve in water. They can remain in the water for a long time and stick to everything they encounter. They are toxic to people, wildlife, and plants. One quart of motor oil can pollute 250,000 gallons of surface water. In the US alone, it is estimated that 180 million gallons of motor oil is leaked, dripped, or otherwise spilled from vehicles each year. Much of this is picked up and carried by stormwater, making used motor oil the largest single source of oil pollution in waterways. As temperatures begin to drop this fall and you prepare for winter weather, please take a minute to make sure that your vehicle is not leaking and contributing to stormwater pollution.

What's Happening?

Electronic Collection and Paper Shredding Event - Saturday, October 9, 9 am - 11:30 am - Got some old or unwanted electronics, or paper in need of shredding? Bring them to this FREE drop off event. Open to all residents of Jefferson County. For event location and what to bring, click [HERE](#).

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day - October 23 - Safely dispose of unwanted prescription drugs - never flush! Contact the Jefferson County [Sheriff's Office](#) or your local municipality for information about collections sites. For year round safe disposal options, click [HERE](#).

2022 Stormwater Calendar - They're here! The 2022 Stormwater Calendar is jam packed with helpful tips on making the most of stormwater on your property, ways to prevent water pollution, a look at Jefferson County's watersheds, and lots of ways to get involved to protect water quality. Stop by the lobby in B200 of the Courthouse to pick up your calendar! Or you can download a copy of the calendar [HERE](#).

Christmas Tree Recycling - Birmingham Zoo - December 26 - January 9 - Give your natural tree a new use by recycling it! Trees are chipped, shredded and mulched. The mulch is used throughout the [Zoo](#) to control stormwater runoff and soil erosion. Be sure to call 205-879-0409 to verify dates and times.

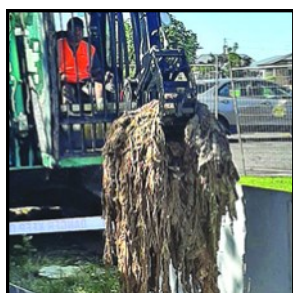
Old as Dirt



Because it seems like dirt is pretty much everywhere outside, we tend to take it for granted. However, the illusion that dirt is plentiful isn't true now and definitely wasn't true early in the earth's history. While scientists agree that the earth is about 4.54 billion years old, dirt (soil) didn't appear on our planet until about 450 million years ago. This thin layer of soil formed from the weathering of rocks and is comprised of minerals, organic materials, air, water and living organisms. Until soil formed on the earth, there were no plants on dry land. Soil allowed vegetation to grow and flourish, which created more soil by breaking down more rock. Large vegetated areas helped to define river banks and direct water flow across the earth. Vegetation decomposed in the soil, made the soil richer, and enabled it to support more vegetation varieties such as trees. Decomposing vegetation gave rise to billions of micro-organisms living in the soil which furthered its ability to support plants, animals, and eventually the needs of people. Time was, and continues to be, an important ingredient in the creation of fertile soil, since it takes at least 100 years to form an inch of topsoil. While the average thickness of soil on the earth today is less than 3 meters, this thin layer is capable of producing food to support most life on earth. (The next time you hear the term 'dirt cheap'

you might want to remember how precious soil really is.) So let's zero in and take a look at your little corner of the earth: your yard. Starting with good soil is the key to enjoying a healthy landscape and productive garden. While amending soil with [composted](#) material is an important aspect in maintaining healthy soil, regularly testing your soil will determine its current fertility and health by measuring the pH level and identifying any nutrient deficiencies. Taking a [soil sample](#) and submitting it for evaluation is an easy and inexpensive (\$7 per sample) way to keep the soil on your property healthy and your yard and garden looking and producing their best. Fall is a great time to find out what, if anything, your soil needs and apply any nutrients that are required. Always follow package directions.

Return of the Fatbergs!



They're back, in all their ooey, gooey, smelly, oily, greasy, and completely disgusting glory. Fatbergs are growing in sewer systems throughout Alabama, wreaking havoc on the sanitary sewer infrastructure. In some cases, they also are 'reeking' havoc! Fatbergs clog the system, create sewer line blockages and overflows, and can even result in sewage backing up into homes. So what's a fatberg? It's a compacted clump of non-biodegradable solids in the sewer lines that are bound together by solidified fat, oil and grease. We take it for granted that when we flush, the contents of the toilet will go to a water reclamation facility and be properly treated and disposed. That is certainly true when water, human body waste, and toilet tissue are flushed. Problems occur when materials that should NEVER be flushed wind up in the sanitary sewer system: "flushable" wet wipes, sanitary products, paper towels, and anything else. Currently, the major problem in our area is people flushing wet wipes after using the toilet. While these products are marketed as flushable, they are not biodegradable and collect in a solid wad along with solidified fats, oil and grease (FOG). If you choose to use wet wipes, a better way to dispose of them is to discard used wipes in the household garbage for disposal in a landfill. A good reminder for what can be flushed is the

three P's: Pee, poo, and paper (toilet). Keeping anything that isn't one of these out of the sanitary sewer system will help prevent expensive household plumbing repair costs, stinky sewage backups, disruptive sewer line repairs, and sewer system overflows into local creeks. To further keep things running smoothly, consider recycling your [FOG](#) for free!

Upcycled Décor



When is an empty tin can more than just a recyclable? When you incorporate it into your next upcycled décor project! Even if you are not crafty, the approaching holiday season is the perfect time to give it a try. A simple search for using recycled materials for holiday décor yields hundreds of easy yet stylish ideas. One super easy project is transforming empty tin cans into luminaries that look great on a mantle, end table, or centerpiece. First, make sure the can is clean. Using a pencil, sketch your desired design on the outside of the can. Fill the can with water, put it into the freezer, and wait until the water is frozen solid. Place the can on its side on towel lying on a flat surface. Use a nail and hammer to punch holes along the pattern that you drew in order to create your desired design. The ice will help prevent the can from denting where you make the holes. Allow the ice to melt enough to remove it from the can, and thoroughly dry the can. If desired, paint the exterior of the can with a water based paint (it may require 2 coats). Use a metallic marker, glitter pen, sequins, or other festive choices to complete the design you created with the holes. Add a candle (traditional or flameless), and enjoy!