DOING THE RIGHT THING FOR OUR LAKES AND RIVERS

Don't P in Your Lake

That's P as in the chemical symbol for phosphorus, a nutrient that in excessive amounts can cause noxious algae blooms in lakes.

The headline comes from an education campaign in a New Hampshire town that encourages people to help keep phosphorus out of the water. It's good rule to follow on any lake.

What's the trouble with phosphorus? It accumulates over time, and too much of it can cause explosive growth of weeds and blue-green algae (cyanobacteria.

Aquatic biologist Darby Nelson explains this brilliantly in his book, "For Love of Lakes." He describes the ingredients in his wife's blueberry muffins and how, if she has only two teaspoons of baking powder (the limiting factor), she can only make one batch – no matter how much flour and sugar and how many eggs she may have.

Then he notes that in lakes, phosphorus is the limiting factor: "Compared to demand, it is phosphorus that is available in least supply…Little phosphorus in lake water begets few cyanobacteria, algae and aquatic plants. Lots of phosphorus begets lots of blue-green algae, or aquatic plants, or both."

The worst culprit here is the blue-green algae, which can reduce dissolved oxygen in the water. That leads to foul-smelling pileups on shore, produces toxins that kill fish, and even makes people and pets sick. So, to keep P out of your lake, what can you do? Here are some tips:

- **Use phosphorus-free fertilizer on your yard or, better yet, no fertilizer.**
- **Use phosphorus-free detergents and dish soaps.**
- **Keep a natural shoreline or at least a buffer strip of natural vegetation to limit runoff.**
- **Have your septic system serviced on a regular schedule.**
- **Take steps to limit runoff from hard surfaces.**

Keeping P out of the water will help preserve the quality of the lake you love.

Did you know…

Yes, doing that other kind of "P" in the lake does add phosphorus. So, use the bathroom.

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ONEIDA COUNTY
Lakes and Rivers Association

One in a series of articles sponsored by the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association (www.oclra.org). For more information, contact Bob Martini at 715-282-5896 or email to webmaster@oclra.org. OCLRA encourages the use and distribution of this material by lake associations, their members, and other parties concerned about water quality.