On fertilizers and stormwater runoff

The year 2018 was the wettest on record for the Garden State. Our average precipitation is about 46 inches — last year, we got about 64 inches. The volume of rain per storm is also increasing, which can trigger flooding— my town has experienced two flooding events in the last year. Stormwater runoff and pollution problems are also increasing here.

The phosphorus and nitrogen in fertilizers not only enhance plant growth on land — they can do the same for aquatic plants when they are carried into them by fast-moving rainwater. This not only harms aquatic ecosystems and affects water quality; it can also lead to algae blooms like that ongoing in Lake Hopatcong, as well as other pollution problems.

There are things we all can do to avoid waterway contamination. Do not apply fertilizer before or after storms, or on water-soaked ground; read the label to ensure you're following application directions. If your property is next to a body of water, follow N.J. law and do not apply fertilizers within 25 feet of that waterway if applying by hand, or within 10 feet if using a drop spreader, rotary spreader, or targeted spray liquid fertilizer. Read labels and be judicious if applying herbicides and pesticides; their toxic chemicals can pollute our groundwater, as well as surface waterways. If you use a lawn care or landscaping service, check to ensure they are N.J. certified, and therefore trained to follow N.J. requirements and laws on the use of lawn and garden products. By educating ourselves and taking action now, we can protect and improve N.J.'s water quality, and avoid future pollution problems.

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