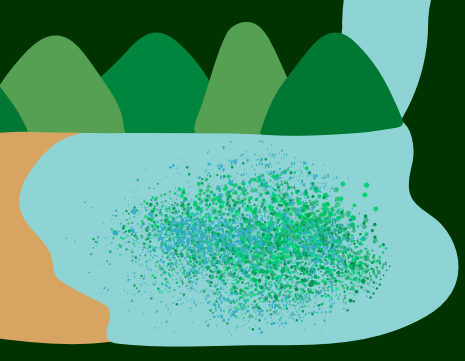
PHOSPHORUS
AND WATER POLLUTION

Water flows downhill over the land into rivers, lakes, and oceans. This process is called runoff. Water runoff carries pollutants into waterways. Sources of these pollutants can be natural, or they can be caused by human activities. Streambank erosion and runoff from developed areas, roads, lawns, and farmlands all contribute to phosphorus pollution.

Phosphorus (P) is a nutrient that is necessary for life. Nutrients are food for plants and animals. Phosphorus is a naturally occurring nutrient and is also a common component of artificial fertilizers. When too much phosphorus, or too much of other nutrients like nitrogen, make their way into water ways, they can cause water quality problems.

Cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) can grow out of control due to an excess of nutrients. Too much cyanobacteria growth can look like a film on top of the water, blocking sunlight to aquatic plants below. This is called a cyanobacteria bloom and can be toxic to humans and animals.



In addition to being toxic, these blooms can create a lack of oxygen in the water that can cause fish and other animals to die from suffocation.

To reduce the effects of phosphorus pollution on Vermont's waterbodies, the Clean Water Initiative Program works with local, state, and federal partners to fund, track, and report on water quality projects.

These water quality projects reduce nutrient and sediment pollution across the land, working toward meeting Vermont's water quality goals.

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