

BEST PRACTICES



Protecting Our Water When Removing Moss

Living in the beautiful green Pacific Northwest means living with moss. Preventing moss buildup from damaging structures such as homes, sheds, driveways, sidewalks and patios can be tricky business. Going to the store and picking up whatever moss killer catches your eye can lead to problems, including possible toxin exposure to pets and children and contamination of our water resources.

Moss requires three things to flourish: moisture, shade and acidic conditions. Reducing these conditions is the first recommended step in reducing problems from moss. Hand removing moss is the second step. Using chemical controls is recommended as a last resort.

It is illegal to discharge any substance other than rain water or snow melt into a water body. This means that allowing moss killers to directly enter any water body is illegal and could lead to a fine. If your roof drainage system is tied directly to any water body, including a stormwater pond, you must disconnect the drainage system before using any chemical moss control.



Tips to Reduce and Remove Moss from Structures:

- Selectively prune vegetation to minimize shade in mossy areas.
- Ensure structures are sloped properly to drain away excess water.
- Scrape moss by hand. For roofs, remove moss carefully with a putty knife. A flat-bladed shovel or scraper can work on hardscapes.
- Driveways, sidewalks and most patios may be pressure washed. Never pressure wash roofs, as this can damage them.
- Use a sprinkle of baking soda on mossy structures to increase the pH to a more alkaline condition. Alternatively, spraying with vinegar, a weak acid, can also kill moss.
- Install zinc strips to the peak of roofs. In large amounts, zinc can be toxic to pets, wildlife and aquatic life, but zinc strips release minimal amounts of zinc during each rainfall.
- If a chemical moss killer is used, the least toxic products are ones which contain ammonium or potassium salts of fatty acids. These are low risk to pets and wildlife but still toxic to aquatic life. They must not be allowed to drain directly to any water body.
- Moss killers containing zinc sulfate are highly toxic to aquatic life. Use only if treated areas do not drain directly to a water body.
- More moss prevention tips and tables listing specific brands of moss killers and their toxicity ratings can be found at <http://growsmartgrowsafe.org>

Source: Stream Team News, Fall 2015



It is the mission of Stream Team to protect and enhance water resources and associated habitats and wildlife in Thurston County through citizen action and education. Stream Team is funded and jointly managed by the stormwater utilities of the Cities of Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater and Thurston County. www.streamteam.info