

FIRE ISLAND GREEN - FIG **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

Be a part of the Fire Island Association's (FIA) commitment, and become a good steward of the environment!

Behind all the beauty and charm that is Fire Island sits a delicate and fragile barrier beach island. Unfortunately, over the years, a rise in pollutants from a myriad of sources has greatly contributed to a growing problem of pollution and degradation of our groundwater, environment, and the Great South Bay.

While there are currently countless studies and pilot programs working on possible long-term solutions we can certainly say, in the interim, that each of us can make a difference.

1. THE SEPTIC SYSTEM (hint, it's not a garbage can.)

Your septic system contains a collection of living organisms that digest and treat household waste. Pouring the wrong things down your drain can kill these organisms and make the system less effective. Untreated wastewater contains bacteria, viruses, and other pollutants. These pollutants can make water in your immediate and downstream areas (wetlands) unsafe for people and wildlife to drink, bathe, or swim.

NEVER FLUSH THESE ITEMS (at the kitchen sink, toilet, bathtub, or utility sink)

- **No Bleach. Never!** A coffee cup's worth of bleach can kill all the beneficial microbes in a 1,000-gallon septic tank.
- Household chemicals like gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze, and paint or paint thinners. Cooking fat or oil. Use a grease can.
- Never use drain cleaners.
- Paper towels and non-flushable wipes, such as baby wipes or other wet wipes
- Dental floss, hair, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, and cat litter.
- **Prescription Drugs.** Do not flush any drugs down the drain. Throw them in the trash, or better yet, return them to most pharmacies that now have drug recycling programs.

2. THE LAUNDRY ROOM

Some of the detergents we use in our washing machines and dishwashers make a very big difference in the amount of harmful ingredients released and high nitrogen loads in the groundwater.

Generally speaking, look for products that are made from plant-based ingredients, and avoid Optical Brighteners, Phosphates, Chlorine Bleach, Artificial Fragrances, and antibacterial chemicals.

Also, avoid powdered laundry detergent: while powdered detergent is less expensive than liquid, it doesn't usually dissolve completely, and small particles of undissolved detergent often remain in suspension in the water.

There are many eco-friendly products that have been certified by the **EPA** under their **SAFER CHOICE** program. This label is displayed on approved products. These products don't need to be fancy or expensive either. For example, a very good and economical product can be found in Costco's KIRKLAND house brand detergent that meets and exceeds these standards.



The EPA also has a terrific search tool for recommended household cleaning products at <https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice/products#search=>

3. OUTDOOR SHOWERS (We agree; it's one of the joys of summer)

With almost 99% of showers taking place “en plein air” during our summer season, virtually none of them run through a septic system, and so, they contribute substantially to groundwater pollution which flows directly into our sandy soil where it quickly reaches the water table.

1. The best recommendation at this point is to use (as best one can) shampoos and soaps that are made from 100% natural ingredients containing no dyes, perfumes, or “enhancers for shine.”

Currently, there is no universal label or agreement on what makes certain shampoos or soaps “green” or environmentally safe. Most of these products are benignly labeled that they are “not tested on animals,” “use recycled bottles,” and are “healthy for your hair.” Superb stuff to be sure, but not necessarily great for the environment.

2. Use the least amount of soap and shampoo as possible and limit the use of conditioners. Possibly think of the outdoor shower as “rinsing the salt and sand off your body” as opposed to a deep cleaning experience that one might have in a city.

3. Do not dye your hair, or perform other major hair-related activities (straighteners and bleaching,) while at Fire Island.

4. DECKS AND OUTDOOR FURNITURE.

While power washing your deck or outdoor furniture seems like a rite of spring to many Fire Island households, harsh chemicals that are designed for industrial use are not appropriate for our sandy soil and groundwater.

1. Never use bleach or harsh cleaners.

2. Look for natural solutions which are commonly available at most hardware stores. (Spend the time and look at the labels — They will say whether they are biodegradable, and if they don't specify, assume that you should not use them.)

3. Avoid cleaning your deck and furniture before, or right after, a rain event. Allow a few hours, to a full day, for the ground's natural ability to soak up the water.

4. Do not use (or at least use sparingly) any fertilizers or pesticides on Fire Island. Again, avoid using any of these products before, or after, a major rain event because they will run directly into the groundwater, and then into the bay.

Next bulletin of **FIRE ISLAND GREEN™**

- Micro-plastics and your washing machine.
- Bring back the clothes line!
- Green Tips for house closings in the fall.

www.fireislandassociation.org
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