

Owasco Lake Watershed

Congratulations and welcome, new homeowners!

We know that it can sometimes be hard to find important information in a new place, so we're bringing some right to you. In the following pages, you'll find a thorough summary of the current rules and regulations that help us protect water quality throughout the watershed and in Owasco Lake.

Since the watershed is home to a wide variety of land uses, many of the rules and regulations may not directly apply to you. However, we encourage you to familiarize yourself with them and keep this document handy for reference.

If we can be of assistance, please contact us!

Sincerely,
[Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division](#)

owascoinspection.org

Office: (315) 427-5188
(315) 209-9840

What is a watershed?

No matter where you go, you're in a watershed—an area of land where all of the water flows to the same place, like a river or lake.

We depend on watersheds to:

- Store our drinking water
- Clean our wastewater and stormwater
- Keep our lakes, rivers, and streams healthy

The Owasco Lake Watershed

Our watershed is 208 square miles located in parts of Cayuga, Tompkins, and Onondaga Counties. Water from 13 towns and 2 villages in these counties eventually flows to Owasco Lake.



Important Contacts

[Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation District](#)

(315) 237-1863

[Cayuga County Health Department](#)

(315) 253-1405

[Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District](#)

(607) 257-2340

[Tompkins County Health Department](#)

(607) 274-6674

[Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District](#)

(315) 457-0325

[Onondaga County Health Department](#)

(315) 435-6600

[NYS DEC Enforcement](#)

(315) 237-1863

[Auburn Water Treatment](#)

(315) 253-8754

[Owasco Water Treatment](#)

(315) 253-3284

There are about 20 square miles of land for each square mile of Owasco Lake. This means that our land use can have a large impact on the water quality of Owasco Lake.

What impact?

Excess rainfall and snowmelt can quickly move soil, nutrients, and chemicals from the landscape. Polluted runoff from across the watershed can flow to Owasco Lake and potentially lower water quality. This can lead to the following:

- Increased cost of drinking water treatment
- Restricted fishing, swimming, and other recreation
- Reduced habitat for native plants and animals

What can I do?

If everyone within the watershed follows the rules and regulations, the water quality in Owasco Lake will remain high for future generations.

General Prohibitions

Activities undertaken within the watershed must conform to the New York State raw water quality standards (part 170 of Title 10 of the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules, and Regulations).

This means that certain landowner activities are restricted within specific distances of open water, including streams and Owasco Lake. We explain these restrictions in the next section.

Please contact your county health department with questions.

Specific Prohibitions

Chemicals

1. **Herbicides** and **pesticides** must not be used, stored, or disposed of directly into a **watercourse** or Owasco Lake.
2. **Toxic substance** storage containers must not be buried within 500 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake without an appropriate permit (check with Cayuga County Planning Department for the [current list of toxic substances](#) and [hazardous waste disposal events](#)).

Helpful Definitions

Herbicides:

Chemicals used to control or inhibit plant growth (usually weeds).

Pesticides:

Chemicals used to control or inhibit the presence of animal pests (like rodents and insects).

Watercourse:

Open water areas that flow to Owasco Lake, including: springs, streams, marshes, and channels.

Toxic Substances:

Generally those labeled with warnings such as caution, danger, warning, poison, corrosive, toxic, flammable, and explosive.

Radioactive:

Materials known to emit alpha, beta, and other ionizing particles, as well as gamma or x-rays.

Refuse:

Includes non-solid waste (yard waste, manure, dead animals and byproducts) and solid waste (garbage, ashes, commercial and industrial wastes).

3. **Radioactive** materials must never be disposed of anywhere within the watershed, above or below ground (check with Cayuga County Planning Department for [hazardous waste disposal events](#)).

Nonhuman Wastes

4. **Refuse** must not be disposed of, above or below ground, within 500 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake (NYS Title 6, Part 360).
5. **Junkyards** must not be located within 100 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake.
6. **Pollutants** (such as those listed under Polluted Runoff) must not be dumped or otherwise released directly into, or within 500 feet of (above or below ground), a watercourse or Owasco Lake (except by permit).
7. **Manure** storage areas must not be located within 250 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake.
8. Manure must be stored to prevent polluted runoff from flowing directly into a watercourse or Owasco Lake (for example, during storm events).
9. Manure must not be applied within 75 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake unless it is plowed into the ground on the same day.

Human Waste (including septic systems)

10. **Human waste** must not be deposited directly into, or where it can easily enter, a watercourse or Owasco Lake.
11. Human waste must not be spread on the ground at any time (except by permit for composted sludge).
12. Human waste must be buried in a trench or pit at least 250 feet from a watercourse or Owasco Lake, at least 5 feet above groundwater, and at least one foot below the surface.
13. Human waste and other polluted liquids must be contained in watertight pipes for underground transport to a sewer or septic system.
14. Seepage/leaching portions of a septic system must be located at least 100 feet from a watercourse or Owasco Lake. The lowest portion of such units must be placed a minimum of 2 vertical feet above the **optimum high-water mark**.

Helpful Definitions

Junkyard:

An area including two or more unregistered and unused vehicles (for disposal, resale/reuse of used parts).

Runoff:

Water from storm events, melting, and other sources that flows over the land in a watershed.

Polluted Runoff:

Runoff containing pollutants such as garbage, sewage, fertilizers, pesticides, other chemicals, rocks, sand, soil, and manure.

Manure:

Solid and liquid waste from farm animals and pets.

Human Waste:

Includes feces, urine, and sewage.

Optimum High-Water Mark:

The recent historic high-water level in Owasco Lake: 713.9 feet. This lake level is used to determine safe placement of structures on the lakeshore, including homes and septic systems.

15. Receptacles and facilities that receive, move, treat, or store human waste must be located at least 100 feet from a watercourse or Owasco Lake unless they are: watertight, water-flushable and connected to sewer or approved septic, or an approved **treatment works** (except by permit).
16. Watertight human waste storage units must be emptied when full to within 6 inches of the top, using drip-proof connections, and disposed of in an approved **sewage** disposal system.
17. Construction of new, or alteration of existing, sewage disposal systems must receive prior approval from the county health department.
18. Failed septic systems must be inspected and evaluated by the county health department prior to modifications or alterations of the existing system.
19. Domestic waste composting and grey water recycling systems must have approval for design plans from the county health department prior to construction.

Structures

20. Huts, tents, shelters, and other buildings located on water or ice must not be within 500 feet of the water supply intakes for the City of Auburn or the Town of Owasco (except waterworks structures).

Cemeteries

21. Human bodies must not be interred within 250 feet of a watercourse or Owasco Lake.

Inspections

On behalf of the City of Auburn and Town of Owasco, the Owasco Lake Watershed Inspection and Protection Division makes regular inspections of the watershed, including Owasco Lake and all watercourses.

Penalties

Any violations of the above rules and regulations can result in fines between \$200 and \$1000 per violation and/or potential imprisonment for up to one year (in accordance with section 1103 of the NYS Public Health Law).

Helpful Definitions

Treatment Works:

Includes treatment plants, sewers, disposal fields, lagoons, pumping stations, septic systems, ditches, incinerators, sanitary landfills, etc., meant to treat, neutralize, stabilize, or dispose of sewage.

Sewage:

Includes liquid and solid waste from domestic, commercial, and private establishments which flows through waste pipes.