

When rustic camping, what soap products are the best to use when washing dishes or bathing?

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) does not have any program that evaluates or otherwise endorses soap products; (product information and use instructions should be found on the label). Instead, there are a few Michigan laws that should be considered before releasing any wastewater into a river, lake, stream or wetland in the state of Michigan. Our water resource protection laws require that wastewaters released into the environment (either to surface waters or to the ground/groundwater) be done in accordance with a permit from the DEQ (Section 324.3112 of the Natural Resources Environmental Protection Act, (NREPA) PA 451 of 1994, as amended). Our laws also protect Michigan waters from the release of anything that can cause the water to have unusual characteristics or otherwise impair uses that can be made of the water (Section 324.3109 of NREPA).

Wastewater treatment systems such as septic systems and wastewater treatment facilities are specifically designed to help break down biodegradable soaps along with any pollutants that are found in wastewater so sending this wastewater to a system or facility is usually the best way to manage wastewater. When you are camping in rustic areas, your options are obviously limited. There is one legal option. The Groundwater Discharge Program rules (Michigan Administrative Code, Rules 323.2204 and 323.2210) have the option of releasing wastewater to the ground without a permit so long as the wastewater is potable water used for domestic activities. This being the case, you would find a place for rinsing well away from the river, lake or stream so that the ground has the ability to take in the wastewater. Along with this practice come certain protections, including: you cannot cause a site of environmental contamination, nuisance conditions, leave ponding or flooding, nor allow for over-spray into another property. The release should be isolated from drinking water sources and within 100 feet inside the property boundary.

Beyond this, you should have permission from the property owner to release wastewater to the ground on the property. Many parks have restrictions so it is important to contact the park for any rules, regulations or management practices that they expect from their patrons. The Department of Natural Resources has some information, "camping hints," on their website (http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10365_10883-31426--,00.html). They even have other tips about being a low-impact camper. Some of these include:

- Protect water sources from contamination.
- Use biodegradable soap, or try hot water soapless dishwashing, bathing and clothes washing.
- When using soap (even biodegradable) and toothpaste, do so at least 100 feet away from natural water sources and well or faucet water sources.

While this is not exactly the response for which you were searching, we hope it is useful towards an environmentally-friendly camping trip.

Best wishes for some excellent weather.