

STORMWATER FAQs

What is storm water?

Storm water is water from precipitation that flows across the ground and pavement when it rains or when snow and ice melt. The water seeps into the ground or drains into storm sewers. These are the drains you see at street corners or at low points on the sides of streets. Collectively, the draining water is called storm water runoff and is a concern because of the pollutants it carries.

Where does the storm water go?

Storm water that does not evaporate or seep into the ground drains into underground storm sewer pipe that carry surface runoff to creeks and drainage ways. Every time it rains, thousands of gallons of storm water enter the storm sewer system. As the runoff flows across lawns, driveways, parking lots and streets, it collects pollutants.

What is storm water pollution?

Many people think that pollution in streams, rivers and lakes only comes from industrial facilities or wastewater treatment plants. What people don't realize is that if all these sources of pollution were eliminated, up to half of the pollution would still remain. The remaining source of pollution that is not caused by specific, identifiable sources is called non-point source pollution. Non-point source pollution is the result of everyday activities. Typical pollutants in urban areas include litter; sediments from exposed soil, pet waste, detergents, pesticides and fertilizers from lawns and gardens, paints, oil, grease and toxic chemicals from motor vehicles, road salts, and household hazardous wastes. When these materials are improperly used or disposed of, they can be picked up by storm water runoff as it flows across streets, parking lots and lawns. After this storm water runoff travels through the storm sewer system, it is discharged to receiving waters without any treatment. As a result, any pollutant that is dumped on the ground can end up in our creeks, rivers and lakes. There are serious problems associated with polluted storm water. The pesticides, bacteria and chemicals that may be present in polluted storm water can pose a health risk to people. Aquatic plants and animals living in streams and rivers may become sick or die from contact with polluted storm water. Clogged catch basins can be unsightly and can cause flooding problems. Each of us must be careful to minimize or eliminate substances which may inadvertently pollute our waterways when it rains.