

Storm water FAQs

What is storm water runoff?

Storm water runoff is water from rain or melting snow that “runs off” across the land instead of seeping into the ground. This runoff usually flows into the nearest stream, creek, river, lake or ocean. The runoff is not treated in any way.

What is polluted runoff?

Water from rain and melting snow either seeps into the ground or “runs off” to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes and other water bodies. On its way, runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water.

Some-like pesticides, fertilizers, oil and soap- are harmful in any quantity. Others-like sediment from construction, bare soil, or agricultural land, or pet waste, grass clippings and leaves- can harm creeks, rivers and lakes in sufficient quantities.

In addition to rain and snowmelt, various human activities like watering, car washing, and malfunctioning septic tank can also put water onto the land surface. Here, it can also create runoff that carries pollutants to creeks, rivers and lakes.

Polluted runoff generally happens anywhere people use or alter the land. For example, in developed areas, none of the water that falls on hard surfaces like roofs, driveways, parking lots or roads can seep into the ground. These impervious surfaces create large amounts of runoff that picks up pollutants. The runoff flows from gutters and storm drains to streams. Runoff not only pollutes’ but erodes stream banks. The mix of pollution and eroded dirt muddies the water and causes problems downstream.

Why do we need to manage storm water?

Storm water is the leading cause for water pollution.

Polluted water hurts the wildlife in creeks, streams, rivers and lakes. Dirt from erosion, also called sediment, covers up fish habitats and fertilizers can cause too much algae to grow, which also hurts wildlife by using up the oxygen they need to survive. Soaps hurt fish gills and fish skin, and other chemicals damage plants and animals when they enter the water.

How is storm water “managed”?

“Best management practices (BMPs)” is a term used to describe different ways to keep pollutants out of runoff and to decrease the high volumes of runoff. These BMPs include laws regarding discharges to the City’s storm water system, education and outreach to bring about behavior change, and constructed systems that are installed to detain and/or treat storm water.

Preventing pollution from entering water is much more affordable than cleaning polluted water! Educating residents about how to prevent pollution from entering waterways is one best management practice. Laws that require construction owners to take steps to prevent erosion is another way to prevent storm water pollution.

Why all the recent fuss about storm water?

The Federal Clean Water Act requires large and medium sized towns across the United States to tackle steps to reduce polluted storm water runoff.

These laws require chosen cities to do six things:

1. Conduct outreach and education about polluted storm water runoff
2. Provide opportunities for public participation and involvement
3. Detect and eliminate illicit discharges
4. Control construction site runoff
5. Control post-construction runoff
6. Perform municipal housekeeping and pollution prevention

What can I do to reduce the amount of storm water pollution I contribute?

Maintain your car or truck. Never dump anything down a storm drain. Always recycle used oil, antifreeze and other fluids. Fix oil leaks in your vehicles.

Wash your car at a commercial car wash rather than in the street or in your driveway. If you wash your car at home, wash it on your lawn.

Cut down on fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. If you use these chemicals, follow directions and use them sparingly. Don’t fertilize before a rainstorm. Consider using organic fertilizers. Compost or mulch lawn clippings. Preserve existing trees or plant new ones- trees hold rainfall and help manage storm water.

Keep litter, leaves and debris out of street gutters and storm drains- these outlets drain directly to our river. Keep storm drains clear to help rain water to drain away quickly to keep streets passable.

Do not dispose of household hazardous waste in storm drains, sinks or toilets. Do not put Flushable wipes in the toilet. They do not degrade as fast as tissue and cause blockages.

Pick up after your pets and keep animals out of streams.

Don't litter!

How else can I help?

Participate in the City Wide Clean Up day. Report storm water violations, when you spot them, to your local government. Keep learning about polluted storm water and tell a friend!

To learn more visit http://cityoftuscumbia.org/?page_id=89