TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY YOUR TOWNSHIP

Reducing Runoff: Clean Water is Every Resident's Responsibility

The next time it rains or when the snow starts melting with the approach of spring, take a look outside. There, you'll see water trickling over your lawn, down your driveway, and into the street.

To some, this may be a calming sight. However, for anyone who knows anything about runoff, this is an alarming event because as the water flows over land, it picks up debris, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants and carries them to nearby streams, wetlands, lakes, and storm sewer systems. There, the runoff is discharged, untreated, into the water we all use for swimming, fishing, and drinking.

As a result, stormwater runoff is one of the greatest threats to the nation's water supplies.

Instead of being part of the problem, though, township residents can be part of the solution by practicing healthy household habits that can keep common pollutants, including pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings, and automotive fluids, off the ground and out of stormwater.

We've pulled together some suggestions to help you get started:

Stormwater runoff tainted with all sorts of debris, chemicals, and dirt is one of the biggest threats to clean water nationwide. Township residents can lessen the problem by practicing healthy habits that keep common household pollutants out of stormwater.

Vehicle and garage

• Use a commercial car wash or wash your car on a lawn or other unpaved surface to minimize the amount of dirty, soapy water flowing into the storm drain and, eventually, local waters.

• Check your car, boat, motorcycle, and other machinery and equipment for leaks and spills. Make repairs as soon as possible. Be sure to clean

up any spilled fluids with an absorbent material, such as kitty litter or sand, and remember: Don't rinse the spills into a nearby storm drain; instead, dispose of the absorbent material properly.

• Recycle used oil and other automotive fluids at participating service stations. Don't dump these chemicals down the storm drain or dispose of them in your trash.

Lawn and garden

• Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly. When use is necessary, follow the guidelines for the recommended amounts. Also, avoid application if the forecast calls for rain; otherwise, chemicals will be washed into local streams.

• Select native plants and grasses that are drought- and pest-resistant. Native plants require less water, fertilizer, and pesticides.

• Sweep up yard debris, rather than hosing down areas, and compost or recycle yard waste when possible.

• Don't overwater your lawn and only water during the cool times of the day. In addition, don't let the water run into the storm drain.

• Cover piles of dirt and mulch that are being used for landscaping projects to prevent pollutants from blowing or washing off your yard and into local waterways. Also, vegetate bare spots in your yard to prevent soil erosion.

Home repair and improvement

• Before beginning an outdoor project, look around for the nearest storm drains and be sure to protect them from debris and other materials.

• Sweep up and properly dispose of construction debris, such as concrete and mortar.

• Use the smallest amount possible of hazardous substances, such as paint, solvents, and cleaners, and make sure you follow the directions on the label. Clean spills immediately and dispose of the waste safely. Homeowners should store substances properly to avoid leaks and spills.

• Purchase and use nontoxic, biodegradable, recycled, and recyclable products whenever possible.

• Clean paint brushes in an indoor sink, not outside. Also, filter and reuse paint thinner when using oil-based paints. One way to properly dispose of excess paints is through a household hazardous waste collection program. Unused paint can also be donated to local organizations.

• Reduce the paved areas and increase the vegetated areas in your yard. Also, use native plants in your landscaping to reduce the need for watering during dry periods. Homeowners should also consider directing downspouts away from paved surfaces onto lawns and take other steps to increase infiltration and reduce polluted runoff. ✦

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*(**Note:** This information was provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.)*

What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff is precipitation *(rain or melting snow)* that flows across the land and could potentially infiltrate the soil, discharge directly into waterways or drain inlets, or evaporate into the atmosphere.

In the natural environment, most precipitation is absorbed by trees and plants or permeates the ground, which results in stable stream flows and good water quality. However, things are much different in the built environment, where rain that falls on a roof, driveway, patio, or lawn runs off the surface more rapidly, picking up pollutants on its way to a stream or storm sewer.

Instead of being part of the problem, though, township residents can be part of the solution by practicing healthy household habits that can keep common pollutants, including pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings, and automotive fluids, off the ground and out of stormwater.

Why can stormwater runoff be a problem?

Poorly managed stormwater runoff can cause a host of problems, including:

Flooding — As stormwater runs off roofs, driveways, and lawns, large volumes can reach streams, causing them to rise quickly and flood. When more impervious surfaces exist, flooding occurs more rapidly and can be more severe, damaging people and property.

Pollution — Stormwater running over roofs, driveways, roads, and lawns will pick up pollutants, such as oil, fertilizers, pesticides, dirt/sediment, trash, and animal waste. These pollutants "hitch a ride" with the stormwater and flow untreated into local streams, polluting our waters.

Streambank erosion — When stormwater flows into streams at unnaturally high volumes and speeds, the power of these flows can severely erode the banks, which creates dangerous situations and damages natural habitat for fish and other aquatic life. This erosion is another source of sediment pollution in streams.