

Stormwater Pollution

Stormwater pollution is a challenging water quality concern. Stormwater is defined as excess rain or snowmelt, referred to as “runoff”, which accumulates after a rainfall or snow event and flows above ground. Impervious surfaces such as driveways, sidewalks, and streets, prevent stormwater from naturally soaking into the ground, or soil. Therefore, runoff (or surface runoff) will then flow into storm drains, creeks, rivers and lakes collecting a number of pollutants such as litter, lawn chemicals, pet waste, automotive fluids, etc. along the way. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that at least 50% of the nation’s water pollution is caused by runoff.

As citizens and business owners, we can directly influence the effects of stormwater pollution by controlling our actions and the contaminants we allow to be present on our properties. The most common pollutants include:

- Illegal dumping of waste into the sewer system (e.g. antifreeze, motor oil, solvents, gasoline, paints, etc.).
- Pesticides and fertilizers from lawns.
- Pet waste.
- Sediment from construction sites.
- Oil and grease from roadways.
- Carelessly discarded trash/litter, including cigarette butts.

Once these hazards have been deposited into the watershed, they can contaminate and negatively impact the recreational and essential use of the natural resource. The pollutants taint the groundwater supply and interfere with the wildlife habitat of fish and other animals.

One of the ways that the Department of Public Works is taking a proactive approach to preventing stormwater pollution is by installing new manhole grates with a graphic of a fish stamped on the surface. This symbol is meant to remind everyone that our actions have a significant impact on the surrounding environment.

Residents and business owners can take an active approach to prevent stormwater pollution by collecting debris on properties; raking grass clippings and leaves from lawns; collecting pet waste; using pesticides and fertilizers sparingly; recycling hazardous waste (antifreeze, motor oil, etc.); repairing vehicles as soon as possible; planting native plants and grasses that require less water, fertilizer and pesticides; and using chemicals (i.e. pool chemicals) at established guidelines.

For more information, please contact the Village of Wheeling, Utility Division at 847-279-6900, or visit the Illinois Environmental Agency’s web page at www.epa.state.il.us.