



Stormwater 101

Why You Should Care About Stormwater

Did you know that most of the water that runs down the gutter into storm drains flows directly into the many creeks running through the city? It isn't treated like water from your sink, tub, or toilet that runs through separate sewer pipelines to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. This is the difference between stormwater and the sanitary sewer.

What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is rainfall or snowmelt that runs off the roofs of our houses, driveways, businesses, streets, alleys, parking lots, lawns and other surfaces. As stormwater flows over our streets and highways, it picks up fuel, oil, grease, antifreeze, and other fluids that leak from vehicles. In addition, highway vehicles contribute sediment and heavy metals such as lead, zinc, copper, and cadmium to stormwater runoff. In residential areas stormwater carries dirt, fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste, soapy wastewater from car washing and chlorinated wastewater from swimming pools into the street, down our storm drains and directly into our creeks. Stormwater runoff from commercial areas is like runoff from our streets but also may contain a wider variety of harmful pollutants. A big source of sediment in stormwater runoff comes from construction sites, where soils erode into the street. These pollutants are sometimes dissolved in stormwater runoff but also are attached to soil particles and organic debris like leaves and grass clippings in the street.

Why should you care?

All of these pollutants degrade the quality of our creeks and local rivers. Oil, fuel, and other petroleum products can suffocate fish and other aquatic organisms by coating their gills or other breathing surfaces, which prevents them from getting the oxygen they need to live. Sediment destroys spawning areas for steelhead, salmon, and other fish by smothering eggs laid in the gravel. It also fills our storm drains requiring more frequent maintenance and settles in creeks which reduce their ability to carry water and potentially cause flooding and increase bank erosion. Heavy metals and pesticides are toxic to aquatic life because they may interfere with the ability of salmon and other migratory fish to find their way back upstream to their spawning streams. High levels of fecal coliform, which comes from pet waste and failed septic systems, make fish, animals, and people sick and can make swimming unsafe. Fertilizer and grass clippings add nutrients to our creeks, which can lead to algae blooms.

Since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, pollution from industrial facilities has been substantially reduced, making stormwater runoff one of the largest remaining sources of water pollution in the United States. These pollutants have harmed virtually all creeks, streams and rivers in Washington State in developed areas. About one-third of all waterways in Washington are too polluted to meet state water quality standards established to protect fish, waterfowl, and other aquatic life, not to mention humans. Locally, some of our creeks exceed water quality standards for fecal coliform, pesticides, temperature, and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). You may be thinking to yourself, "Stormwater runoff can't be a big problem here in Walla Walla – it hardly ever rains." Even though it does not rain as much here as on the west side of the state, these pollutants still accumulate, and as a result, are even more concentrated in stormwater runoff when it does rain.



What can you do?

Here are a few simple things you can do to help reduce stormwater pollution:

- Properly maintain your motor vehicles; clean up and fix leaks.
- Protect exposed soil from erosion.
- Wash your car on the lawn or at a commercial car wash.
- Pick up and dispose of pet waste properly.
- Don't discharge chlorinated swimming pool or hot tub wastewater into the street.
- Don't place grass clippings in the street or in creeks.
- Keep dirt, leaves and other yard debris out of the creeks.
- Don't litter.
- Help keep our streets clean by picking up trash in the gutter.
- Take care not to over-fertilize or let fertilizer get into the street.
- Dispose of all hazardous waste properly.

Remember...only rain down the drain. Keep our rivers and creeks healthy!

Questions and/or Comments?

Contact the City of Walla Walla Stormwater Coordinator at 509.527.4537

Resources Available to Help

Household Hazardous Waste Facility: this facility at the Sudbury Regional Landfill accepts household hazardous waste such as motor oil, antifreeze, household cleaners, paint, pool and spa chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, batteries, and fluorescent light bulbs.

Green Waste/Compost Program: the city offers weekly residential curbside collection service from March through November for the disposal of green waste (also known as yard waste) or you may bring it directly to the Sudbury Regional Landfill's compost facility year-round. Green waste includes grass clippings, leaves, tree trimmings, small limbs (<4" diameter for containers) and garden waste. This green waste is processed into compost which is available for purchase to the public as a soil amendment. Compost can help reduce your fertilizer and pesticide use as well as help reduce soil erosion. More information on these programs is available at wallawalla.gov/government/public-works/solid-waste/compost-green-waste.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Washington State Department of Ecology (DOE) offer information and resources to help prevent pollution through environmentally friendly lawn care practices and proper disposal of household hazardous waste at epa.gov/ and ecology.wa.gov/.