

What is stormwater? When it rains, the rain water flows over the land and especially over waterproof surfaces (such as roads, driveways, roofs, and even lawns). Storm water runoff is the water that the ground cannot absorb. Eventually, it flows into nearby streams or into drains that lead to streams. Along its way, the water picks up sediments and pollutants. It often flows into streams and rivers without any treatment.

How does stormwater affect my community? The flow of storm water can lead to flooding because there is more water traveling over paved or compacted surfaces than the natural ground can absorb. As the flow increases, it concentrates in low areas which become prone to flooding.

The increased volume of water flowing into local streams during a rain storm may carry sediment and cause stream bank erosion, destroying habitat and altering the natural landscape. The storm water itself can carry pollutants such as fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, oils, sediments, and other substances that collect on roads, soils, and driveways. The pollutants flow with the storm water directly into streams or through storm drains into the watershed. This kind of pollution is termed “non-point source pollution” because it derives from the daily activities of people everywhere rather than from any single polluting source.

Examples of Non-point Pollution:

- Soil sediments
- Oil, grease and toxic chemicals from motor vehicles
- Pesticides and nutrients from lawns and gardens
- Viruses, bacteria and nutrients from pet waste and failing septic systems
- Road salts
- Heavy metals from roof shingles, motor vehicles and other sources
- Thermal pollution from dark impervious surfaces such as streets and rooftops

Increasing frequency of extreme weather events is costing government agencies an increasing proportion of their resources for renewal and repair of local storm water management infrastructure. Often municipalities and states are mandating water discharge fees for users due to the escalating costs of stormwater management.

What can I do to make a difference? To decrease polluted runoff from paved surfaces, households can develop alternatives to areas traditionally covered by impervious surfaces. Porous pavement materials are available for driveways and sidewalks, and rain gardens with native vegetation and mulch can replace high maintenance grass lawns. Homeowners can use fertilizers sparingly and sweep driveways, sidewalks and roads instead of using a hose. Instead of disposing of yard waste, they can use the materials to start a compost pile. And homeowners can learn to use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to reduce dependence on harmful pesticides.

Households can prevent polluted runoff by picking up after pets and using, storing and disposing of chemicals properly. Drivers should check their cars for leaks and recycle their motor oil and antifreeze when these fluids are changed. Drivers can also avoid impacts from car wash runoff (e.g., detergents, grime, etc.) by using car wash facilities that do not generate runoff.



Garrett Hill Coalition and project partners:

Radnor Township • Radnor Memorial Library • Aqua America • Bryn Mawr Boy Scout Troop 19 • Chanticleer Garden • Delaware Riverkeeper Network • Villanova University Urban Stormwater Partnership