

Stormwater Pollution from Residential Areas

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THE STORMWATER SYSTEM

The stormwater system drains directly into our creeks, lakes and rivers without treatment. The *Environment Protection Act 1997* aims to protect our aquatic environments by keeping stormwater as clean as possible. You can do your part to keep our creeks, lakes and rivers clean by becoming more aware of how your activities affect water quality.

Be aware that the stormwater system is separate from the sewerage system. Make sure all the members of your household understand the difference. For instance, inside your house the kitchen sink, laundry, toilet and bathroom drains are connected to the sewer, or septic tank in un-sewered areas. You may also have a sewer connection under your outside tap via a gully trap. All other areas where rainfall collects, including roof drains, should be connected to the stormwater system. The stormwater system is designed to carry rain from your driveway, paved areas, carparks and streets directly to our waterways without treatment.

Stormwater can carry pollution to our creeks, lakes and rivers. Run-off from cities can be of poor quality because of the large number of pollution sources. Litter and rubbish are usually the most visible form of stormwater pollution. Contaminants such as soil, nutrients, oil and grease, cigarette butts, animal faeces, detergents, organic matter, residual chemicals and excess fertilisers all add up to cause a significant impact on the environment. This can result in fish kills, algal blooms, unsafe swimming conditions, the accumulation of toxins in aquatic animals, or unsightly creeks, lakes and rivers that degrade our parks and recreation areas.

YOUR LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is your responsibility to ensure that you prevent contaminants from your activities entering the stormwater system.

Specific activities you may do around your house are discussed below. The aim is to help you determine the best way to keep stormwater as clean as possible.

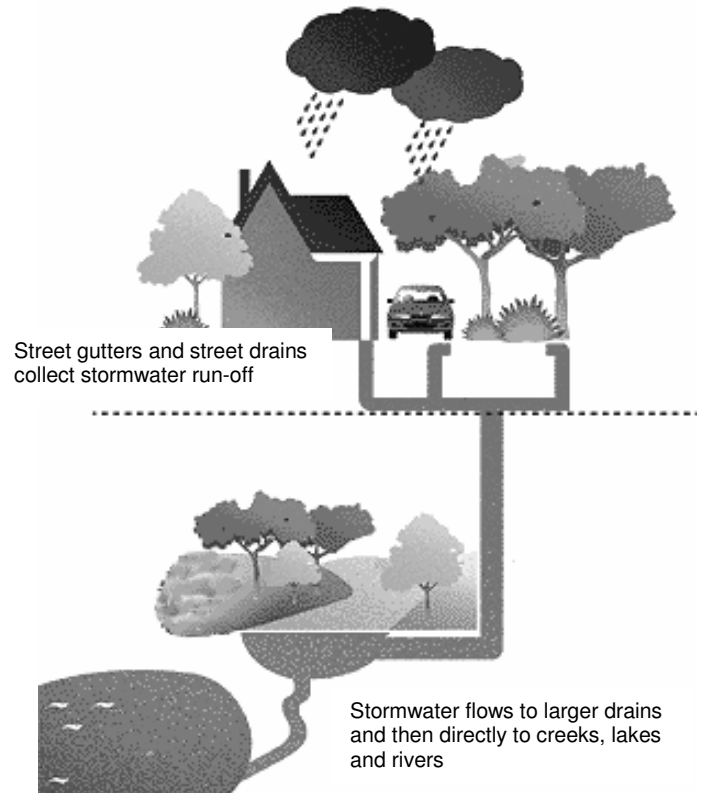


Image courtesy of Melbourne Water (www.melbournewater.com.au)

Vehicle and Equipment Washing

When water restrictions allow, wash your car and other equipment on grassed or gravelled areas where they are available, so that water and detergents can soak into the ground. This helps prevent wastes being washed down the stormwater system and will also help water the lawn or garden.

Commercial vehicles and equipment must be washed in a commercial car wash facility if there is not an appropriate grassed or gravelled area available.

Vehicles produce a variety of contaminants in road run-off including copper from brake wear, zinc from tyre wear and oils and greases from leaks. To reduce stormwater pollution from cars, your vehicle should not leak oil or any other fluids, including coolants.

Regular servicing of your vehicle will help prevent pollution. If you notice an oil leak from your car, spot clean it and get the leak fixed as soon as possible.



Gardening

Green waste must not be dumped into the stormwater system. Sweep grass cuttings and leaves from street gutters, footpaths and driveways and put them in your compost, garden or take them free of charge to:

- Corkhill Brothers at Mugga Lane Landfill;
- Canberra Sand and Gravel at Parkwood Road Recycling Estate or, for a small fee, Mitchell.

Ensure areas around your yard and the nature strip in front of your house are maintained so that soil, mulch, gravel, etc are not able to wash into the stormwater system.

Animal Faeces

Animal owners are responsible for cleaning up after their pets, especially while out walking their dogs. Owners should collect all faeces and then bury them in the garden or dispose of them in a sealed bag in the general garbage.

'Pooper scoopers' made from recycled materials are readily available. Dog faeces wash from footpaths and driveways to the stormwater system directly into our creeks, lakes and rivers, and pose a health threat to swimmers.

Pesticides

Use pesticides carefully and according to the manufacturer's label. Avoid using fertilisers and chemicals where they could enter the stormwater system.

Swimming Pools and Spas

Plumbing should be constructed so that backwash wastewater from swimming pools and spas is directed to the sewer. In un-sewered areas it may be discharged to gardens and lawns. Seek approval from ACTEW for disposal to the sewer. If the pool needs to be emptied, the water should not be directed to stormwater. Empty the pool gradually to allow the water to soak into grass or garden beds (ensuring water does not go onto neighbouring properties).

Wastewater Disposal

Wastewater is any water used or contaminated as a result of your cleaning activities.

Wastewaters or wash down waters from cleaning operations must not be discharged to the stormwater system. Wash down water volumes should be minimised and where possible, directed to soakage areas in the garden or lawn.

Rather than hosing down driveways and paths and creating discharges to the stormwater system, you should dry sweep areas that need to be cleaned. The sweepings should be placed in the garden or compost.

Home Handy People

Make sure any stockpiled material (e.g. mulch, soil, or sand) is prevented from entering the stormwater system. A cover can be used to contain the material. Materials must not be stored/placed near the stormwater system. A silt fence or similar barrier should be used to filter water and stop soil from entering the stormwater system.

Paint stripping, sawdust, and other building wastes should be collected and disposed of in general garbage or to landfill.

Wastewater from washing paintbrushes, brick cutting and other problem wastes must not be allowed into the stormwater system. Instead, dispose of wastewater by tipping it onto a flat, grassy area or an area that will retain liquid. Dried solid waste can then be disposed of in general garbage or to landfill.

Landscaping

You should consider opportunities to direct run-off to garden and lawn areas when landscaping. Take care to ensure building footings are adequately protected and any excess water is disposed of appropriately.

Rainwater Tanks

Rainwater tanks contribute to the protection of the environment in our local creeks, lakes and rivers. They do this by reducing run-off and by slowing the flow of stormwater from our urban environment, so fewer pollutants are transported into our water supply. You could consider installing a rainwater tank to provide water for your garden, to wash your car, to top up your swimming pool, or with additional plumbing, to connect to your toilet or washing machine.

If there are any activities that have not been discussed, or questions you need answered, please contact the Environment Protection Authority by calling Canberra Connect on 13 22 81.

