

STORM SEWERS – RIVERS BENEATH OUR FEET

Storm sewers are pipes laid underground, often below streets. Inlets or drains located along curbs and in parking areas collect storm runoff into these pipes, which carry the flows to the river. A common misconception is that water running off streets goes into a sewage treatment plant. It does not. In fact, stormwater usually receives no treatment.

Stormwater is Not Clean Water

Stormwater runoff carries pollutants that seriously harm our waters:

- Sediment. Soil particles washed off construction sites or farm fields into a lake or stream make the water cloudy or turbid. When sediment settles out of the water, it gradually fills in the river bed.
- Phosphorus. This nutrient, often attached to soil particles, fuels the growth of algae and aquatic weeds. These plants are important in providing habitat for fish and wildlife. However, rapid and excessive growth of algae and aquatic plants can degrade water quality and interfere with swimming, boating and fishing.
- Micro-organisms. Bacteria, viruses and other disease causing organisms make waterways unsafe for swimming, wading and other types of recreation. Some of these organisms, notably *Cryptosporidium*, are difficult to remove through water treatment and may endanger people who depend on drinking water supplies drawn from lakes or streams.
- Toxic chemicals. Motor oil, lead from gas and auto exhaust, zinc from roof drains and tires, and pesticides in stormwater runoff may kill aquatic organisms or impair their health, growth or ability to reproduce.

We Can All Help!

Each of us contributes to stormwater pollution and each of us can help stop it. Here are some ways you can help:

- Keep pesticides, oil, leaves and other pollutants off streets and out of storm drains.
- Divert roof water to lawns or gardens where it can safely soak in.
- Clean up pet waste – bury it or flush in down the toilet.
- Keep cars tuned up and repair leaks – or better yet, walk, bike or take the bus.

The amount of pollution that you stop may seem small, but together it all adds up to cleaner water for everyone to enjoy!

Adapted from University of Wisconsin–Extension in cooperation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. (1999). *Cleaning Up Stormwater Runoff - A Series of Water Quality Fact Sheets about Stormwater Runoff*. [Brochure]. Author: Johnson, C.