



Why Our Community Needs a Stormwater Program

Across our region and throughout Virginia, stormwater pollution is a serious issue that the state government is requiring communities address. While it is sometimes hard to see the damage that stormwater does to our waterways, we all rely on them for drinking water.

That's why we all need to pitch in to make sure they're healthy, or face the consequences of degrading our rivers, creeks, streets and our homes. Our community is contributing to solving the stormwater problem by adopting an ordinance requiring all new development to address their stormwater impacts.



Stormwater pollution entering the James River. Photo courtesy of James River Association Volunteer RiverRat

The History of Stormwater:

- 1948: Federal Pollution Control Act adopted and identifies clean water as a resource
- 1972: Federal Clean Water Act adopted and begins elimination of pollutant discharges into waterways
- 1973: Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Law adopted. Localities began operating programs to prevent water quality degradation with state oversight
- 1988: Virginia's Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act is established. "Tidewater" local governments adopt programs to ensure that development does not harm water quality
- 1989: Virginia Stormwater Management Act adopted to prevent harm from unmanaged stormwater—only state projects and "Tidewater" localities were required to comply
- 2012: Integration of Virginia's Water Quality Programs is adopted requiring all counties and cities to adopt stormwater programs

What is stormwater pollution?

When it rains, the water falls on rooftops, streets, sidewalks and parking lots and then flows to our community's waterways. Along the way, it picks up all kinds of pollutants like pet waste, fertilizers and pesticides, oil and automotive fluids. Much of the ground in cities and suburbs is covered in surfaces that do not allow this water to absorb – surfaces like asphalt, cement, and roofing material (also called impervious surfaces) – this makes polluted stormwater which flows into our rivers, streams and lakes.

What are the impacts of stormwater pollution?

Stormwater adversely impacts the *quality* of our local waters, as it carries with it various pollutants, sediments, and other debris from the surfaces over which it runs off. Stormwater also creates *quantity* problems which result in flooding, stream bank erosion, combined sewer overflows (CSO), basement flooding, and sewer backups. Polluted stormwater also often negatively affects drinking water sources. This, in turn, can affect human health and increases drinking water treatment costs.

Why is it important to address stormwater now?

Virginia has mandated that localities adopt stormwater programs by July 1, 2014. But more importantly, if we don't want to face increased flooding in our homes, businesses, and streets, increased pollution in our rivers and streams, and increased fines for inaction, we need to act now. The outdated methods that we rely on to carry our stormwater are not up to the task. Our new local programs will be designed to handle stormwater runoff and improve our waterways for future generations.



A stormwater inlet receiving polluted runoff. Photo courtesy of the City of Lynchburg



How do we make sure new development addresses stormwater?

Virginia is requiring that all local governments adopt ordinances which address stormwater from new development. These ordinances will ensure that the stormwater issue is addressed at newly developed sites by requiring them to absorb or capture rainwater. The new ordinance will apply to all new development over one acre or sites that are part of a common plan of development. These development sites will need to prepare plans to address their stormwater impacts and install practices on the site to address the pollution. Local staff will then review these plans as a part of the development process. When sites are being redeveloped, the ordinances will also require them to update their outdated stormwater systems. Homeowners and existing development can also take steps to address their stormwater impacts by installing practices on their properties.

How does the stormwater solution get funded?

The fairest way to distribute the cost of these improvements is through applying them to new development. Fees are paid to the locality for administering the stormwater program by those constructing new homes and businesses, since these are the properties that will be contributing to the stormwater issue. Those responsible for the development will also pay for the stormwater infrastructure being installed on their sites. Nobody likes new fees, but the cost of ignoring stormwater pollution will be much higher for our community — and far less equitable or predictable.

What is being done to spread the word on the upcoming stormwater changes?

Local governments in our region are working together on a comprehensive outreach program to educate all those that will be impacted by the newly proposed stormwater ordinance. This campaign not only includes outreach materials, such as flyers and websites, but also includes workshops for contractors as well as presentations for all those who are interested.

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