What you can do as a Local Official

U.S. EPA | STORMWATER OUTREACH AT EPA NEW ENGLAND

STORMWATER *is a leading cause of poor water quality. Rain or melted snow runs down driveways, sidewalks and streets carrying oil, dirt and other pollutants into nearby waterways. Polluted runoff, which can cause erosion and flooding, runs into waterways and degrades plants, fish, shellfish and other wildlife. In water used for recreation, the runoff can lead to illness, and people who eat contaminated fish can also become sick. Untreated stormwater can also contaminate drinking water sources.*

INTRO:

As a local official, you are in a key position to help reduce the polluted stormwater that your community discharges into local waterways. Your commitment to following state and federal environmental laws and regulations, to developing local laws and policies that protect the environment and to managing stormwater properly can make a significant difference in how much pollution enters nearby lakes, rivers, streams, groundwater and oceans. Your role as a public official gives you influence and visibility. You can be a leader for both individual and institutional change.

TO HELP MANAGE STORMWATER:

Follow the law — As a local official, you must comply with the local stormwater or municipal separate stormwater system (MS4) general permit, which regulates the stormwater discharge of hundreds of towns and cities in New England. This permit requires communities, among other things, to have a plan to manage stormwater and to eliminate illegal discharges from stormwater systems.

Revise land use laws and policies — Your community should adopt policies and regulations that protect the wetlands, floodplains and vegetated stream buffers that allow water to infiltrate back into the ground. You should also promote, or even require, low impact development (LID). This kind of development involves designing sites to reduce stormwater runoff and the cost of managing that runoff. These options include: directing rainwater into rain gardens, reducing the amount of impervious area in your town, and storing water. Local regulations may inadvertently discourage these practices by requiring curbing or large road widths.

Consider new funding sources — A stormwater utility helps pay for stormwater management by collecting fees from property owners in proportion to a property's stormwater contribution.

Don't delay in fixing your infrastructure — The pipes and systems that carry sanitary sewage in New England may be old and in poor condition. After heavy rains, stormwater can overwhelm the sanitary sewage infrastructure and result in untreated sewage flowing into basements and streets. The cost of repairing or replacing infrastructure is high, but treating groundwater that flows into leaking pipes or responding to an emergency break may be costlier.

Educate your community — Through media, email, regular mail, meetings, websites and word of mouth, you can teach the community about the potential damage caused by stormwater runoff. Do residents know pet waste on sidewalks can raise bacteria and nutrient levels in streams and ponds, that saving water saves money and helps reduce stormwater costs, or that planting a tree or designing "green streets" makes the town more attractive and can increase property values?

Set an example — Sweeping streets, cleaning catch basins and using porous pavement in parking areas all help manage stormwater. Rain gardens in public areas are aesthetically appealing: encourage residents and businesses to consider rain gardens and rain barrels.

➲ *If you are a municipality, an industry or developer, you may be subject to regulation under a federal or state stormwater permit. Make sure you are aware of and comply with all applicable regulations. (http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/swbasicinfo.cfm)*

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