



# Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention

SPOKANE COUNTY  
PUBLIC WORKS

DIVISION OF  
ENGINEERING & ROADS  
STORMWATER UTILITY

April 2009

## BE PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT PART OF THE POLLUTION!



**The health of our rivers, lakes, and aquifer depends on you!**

Storm-drain systems are an essential network of channels and pipes that collect rainwater and snowmelt to prevent flooding of our streets, yards, and even our homes and businesses. Runoff in dry weather (i.e. irrigation, sprinklers, and residential car washing), also flows into storm drains.

Today, the number one source of water pollution is urban runoff, the water that flows from our streets and parking lots to the storm drain system. Each one of us, living and/or working in Spokane County, contributes small amounts of contaminants to runoff that can add up to a huge problem for the environment.

We can no longer point to "dirty" industries, waste treatment plants, or dumps and landfills as the only significant contributors to water pollution. In addition, industrial and commercial facilities have been cleaning up their operations for years now.

So, the protection and health of our waterways, including streams, lakes, and even the Spokane River, depends on you. It is up to every County resident and business to do their part and take simple steps to help eliminate runoff pollution.

Take a moment to review this handout to learn more about urban runoff. Remember, YOU are the solution to runoff pollution!

## HOW DO WE CONTRIBUTE TO RUNOFF POLLUTION?



### Illegal Dumping

People sometimes look for a "shortcut" to dispose of used oil, antifreeze, detergents, or other wastes, and storm drains do seem like the easiest solution! But, hazardous products that are improperly disposed of in storm drains harms aquatic habitats and our drinking source, the aquifer, by adding toxic and/or nutrient enriching chemicals to the water. These products include pesticides, insecticides, and fertilizers; bleach; aerosols; drain cleaners; and certain detergents labeled "toxic."

### Pet Waste

While many people believe animal waste is good fertilizer, it is actually a health hazard and shouldn't be composted for use in your home garden. Pet waste contains parasites, bacteria, and viruses which, if left on the ground, contaminates stormwater and, ultimately, our rivers, lakes, and aquifer. Yuck!



### Quick Facts

- Today, 40% of the waterways in the United States are not clean enough for fishing or swimming.
- The average home contains more than 6 gallons of materials that are potentially toxic to aquatic life.
- More than 100 million gallons of used motor oil are improperly disposed of every year.



**WE HAVE A  
HOTLINE!**

**If you see  
someone  
polluting a  
storm drain or  
waterway ...**

**CALL  
509.477.7525**

## Glossary

### Illicit Discharge

The discharge of non-stormwater to the storm-drain system, thereby contributing to water pollution.

### Erosion

The washing or wearing away of surface soils primarily by the action of water.

### Storm-Drain System

Collects and transports rain and snowmelt via gutters, ditches, drywells, pipes, catch basins, etc., to prevent flooding in urban areas. Anything that flows or is discharged into the system goes directly to area streams, rivers, lakes, the aquifer, or other waters.

### Urban Runoff

Rain and any other water that passes through and out of developed areas (streets, parking lots, roof tops, etc.) into the storm-drain system.

## SPOKANE COUNTY PUBLIC WORKS

### DIVISION OF ENGINEERING & ROADS STORMWATER UTILITY

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Stormwater



## HOW WE CONTRIBUTE TO RUNOFF POLLUTION...

(CONTINUED)



### Construction Projects

Disturbing soil and vegetation during construction increases erosion. The major stream pollutant by weight and volume is sediment. In addition to creating murky water conditions, sediment carries with it metals, pesticides, and nutrients which have a tendency to bind onto the soil particles. This nutrient input leads to the depletion of oxygen in our surface waters. When that happens, fish and other aquatic life suffocate!

### Automobiles

Oil, grease, radiator fluid, antifreeze, and copper dust from brake pads are just a few of the common pollutants automobiles contribute to urban runoff pollution. Improperly maintained vehicles deposit oil, hazardous fluids, and air particulates which fall onto our streets and make their way into our storm drain system. Oh, and not to mention pollute the air we breathe!



### Landscaping

Blowing, hosing, or otherwise moving grass clippings and leaves into the street not only clogs storm-drains inlets, but adds too much decomposing material to water which depletes oxygen in our rivers and lakes. Additionally, over-applying pesticides and fertilizers simply allows more chemicals to wash away during a rainstorm.

### Home Maintenance

Washing building fascia, driveways, and sidewalks; and wet cutting stone and tile all contributes polluting sediments to our waterways. This wash water should be diverted to a grassy area where it can be absorbed by and filtered into the ground. Additionally, disposing of excess building materials (i.e. unused stucco, cement, paint, grout, dry wall mud, etc.) into the street clogs storm-drain inlets and pipes when they harden.



For more information on urban runoff pollution prevention contact:  
Spokane County Public Works, Division of Engineering & Roads, Stormwater Utility at 509-477-3600

## A FEW OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN RUNOFF POLLUTION...

