



STORMWATER POLLUTION

In populated places, in cities and towns, a large area of the land surface has been paved or covered with roads and buildings which increases water run-off during rainfall. This runoff is called stormwater. Stormwater pollution is one of the biggest threats to the health of our waterways. Stormwater systems such as drains and pipes are directly connected to streams, rivers, oceans and other waterways and as a result impact on their quality. This is because rainfall carries wastes found in the streets and systems themselves such as litter, toxic chemicals, oils and grease, animal waste, nutrients and sewage overflows and transports them into the waterways. Even if you do not live near a waterway, the runoff will flow down the street into a ditch or storm drain that eventually empties into a waterway.

Litter has been identified as the largest source of stormwater pollution. As well as diminishing water quality and aesthetic/recreational opportunities, it is also a hazard to wildlife. In 2000, a Bryde's whale washed up dead near Cairns, with an autopsy revealing a stomach tightly

packed with plastic (Victorian Litter Action Alliance). Litter can also stay in our waterways for a long time, such as cigarette butts, which can take 25 years to break down!

Stormwater pollution can also harm our environment by reducing the usability of our waters (for example, for drinking, swimming and boating), destroying native habitat, eroding creek banks and degrading native bushland by introducing nutrients and weeds through stormwater waste. Reducing stormwater waste provides many benefits for the environment as well as for us. Not only will waterways be safe for use, but they will be healthier for the plants and animals that rely on them. Ratepayers will also be spending less money on emptying stormwater pollutant traps that most areas have in place to help minimise negative impacts. Minimising stormwater pollution requires everyone to take responsibility and ensure that only rainwater enters stormwater systems. Reference: Victoria Litter Action Alliance, online at <http://www.litter.vic.gov.au>

WHAT CAN I DO?

The following are some examples of ways to reduce stormwater impact on water quality. The websites listed below these outline many further ideas.

Responsible garden care: rethink the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Use natural pest control methods and never fertilise before a rainstorm.

Disposal of litter: Carry a bag for waste in the car, do not throw it out the window. Use ashtrays, carry a butt-box and dispose of in a rubbish bin.

Chemical disposal: take old chemicals such as paint, paint strippers, fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, oil, and car batteries to your local household hazardous waste collection site for safe disposal or call your local Council.

Car cleaning: Wash your car on the grass (the water will be soil treated and the grass will benefit from the water) or wash your car at a commercial car wash.

Gardening: never sweep or hose leaves, or other garden cuttings down the gutter into the stormwater drain. Instead feed these organic materials back to your garden as mulch or compost.

Pets: Animal waste contributes harmful bacteria to waterways if not disposed of appropriately. Take a 'pooper-scooper', collect in plastic bags and deposit in the rubbish bin.

Septic Systems: Poorly maintained systems harm water quality by leaking raw sewage into surface water runoff. If you have seen someone polluting stormwater drainage, contact your local council and/or local water authority. The NSW Department of Environment and Conservation also has a pollution hotline on 131 555. For other states, search your environmental authority website.

MORE INFORMATION

- <http://www.stormwatercenter.net/> - an advanced U.S. site dealing with more technical aspects of stormwater management, also including a wide variety of resident information in the 'factsheets' section
- <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/stormwater/> - great comprehensive site on many facets of stormwater as well as lists of appropriate contacts for pollution reporting and good community resources.
- <http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/eduinfo.html> - success stories in eliminating non-point source pollution across America.