

When rain falls and snow melts, the runoff produced picks up a variety of contaminants such as oil, metals, salts, pet waste, fertilizer, and grass clippings as it flows over roofs, roadways, sidewalks and lawns.

Stormwater runoff ultimately flows into storm drains.

**Remember: storm drains lead directly to our local rivers and streams.**



As the name suggests, stormwater begins in storm clouds as rain. Stormwater runoff is also created when snow melts in the spring. If the ground is a natural surface like in a forest, the water can soak into the ground and be absorbed by soil and plants. If the ground is hard, or impervious, like roads, and parking lots, water will run off and be directed somewhere else.



Depending on where rain falls determines what the stormwater runoff will pick up along the way. If rain falls on a farmer's field, it could pick up fertilizer or manure, or possibly pesticides and herbicides used to treat the field. If rain falls on an urban landscape, it could pick up litter, oils and gasoline, salts, and heavy metal contaminants. Natural landscapes pose little threat, as natural materials like leaves and plants are what may be picked up and washed into a river.



Stormwater eventually ends up in a storm drain, or runs off land into a nearby waterway. Storm drains take stormwater directly into rivers, lakes and streams, along with anything and everything the stormwater brought with it. In some cases, when cities have combined sewer systems, stormwater goes to a water treatment plant before being discharged to a waterway.



There are many negative effects of stormwater. Heavy metals and chemicals can permanently alter ecosystems. Excess nutrients from fertilizers can cause harmful algal blooms. Strong storms can bring flooding and fast-moving water, which cause erosion. Animal waste from pets or geese can lead to harmful bacteria in the water, which can make people and animals sick.

## You can help improve stormwater runoff and water quality:

- Consider planting a rain garden, which will help absorb and filter the stormwater on your property.
- Clean up after your pets, don't let your grass clippings go down the storm drain, and be mindful of the salt you put outside in the winter. Anything on the ground outside can end up in the storm drains.
- Make sure to dispose of household hazardous wastes like paint, cleaners, and oils properly. Check your county's website for more information on disposal.