

When It Rains It Drains  
KY Water Awareness Month 2016 Article

Have you given much thought to storm drains? Storm drains help prevent flooding by draining rainwater and melted snow and ice off paved surfaces. As the water runs off paved surfaces, it enters a storm drain and is carried and released into a nearby waterbody, such as a stream. One common mistake that many people make is that the water runoff, often referred to as stormwater, is treated and cleaned after it enters a storm drain. This is far from the truth. Stormwater that enters a storm drain is typically not cleaned or treated before entering a stream, river, or lake.

As stormwater flows across lawns, parking lots, streets, and sidewalks, it picks up pollutants. These pollutants may include fertilizers and pesticides applied to lawns or gardens, sediments from construction sites and areas with bare soil exposed, cigarette butts, fast food wrappers, and other forms of litter, oil and other automotive fluids, pet waste, soaps used from washing vehicles, and any other substance that has been left on the ground. This polluted runoff then enters streams, rivers, and lakes by way of storm drains. As a result, these water bodies have poor water health, and can be hazardous to animals and humans.

You can help prevent stormwater pollution! Follow these simple steps to do your part in keeping Kentucky's streams, rivers, and lakes clean:

- Use pesticides and fertilizers properly. Follow all label instructions. Do not apply pesticides and fertilizers if rain is expected within a 24 hour period.
- Prevent soil erosion by covering areas of bare soil with mulch, or planting ground covers or other plants.
- Dispose of all trash properly. Never litter.
- Plan a community clean-up event to pick up trash and litter. Ask local businesses and organizations to donate garbage bags and disposable gloves.
- Maintain vehicles to prevent leaks.
- Pick up after your pet.
- Wash vehicles in grassy areas or at a car wash.
- Install a rain barrel. By collecting rainwater from your roof, you are reducing the amount of stormwater that enters storm drains, and conserving water to use on your lawn and garden.
- Plant a rain garden. Rain gardens are designed to capture and filter stormwater from paved surfaces.

For more information on ways to help prevent stormwater pollution contact your local Extension office.



Storm drain in neighborhood. Image Citation: A. Osborne, UK CAFE.



An unidentified blue substance flowing into a storm drain. Image Citation: Carmen Agouridis, UK CAFE.



Stormwater picks up and carries trash and other pollutants to nearby streams, polluting our local waterbodies. Image Citation: Amanda Gumbert, UK CAFE.

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