

FACT sheet



OUR CATCHMENT - Stormwater

What is stormwater?



Stormwater is water that flows into drains and waterways during and after rainfall in urban areas.

Excess water that cannot soak into the soil travels via surface drains and underground pipes, which flow into streams, rivers and bays. This water generally flows untreated directly into the rivers and streams that make up our catchments.

The difference between the wastewater and stormwater systems

Most people don't stop to think what happens to water and wastes that leave our homes. Very few people realise that there are two separate systems which carry water away from our homes. They are the wastewater or sewerage system and the stormwater system.

Water from our bathrooms, kitchens, laundries and toilets, is taken from houses via the sewerage system to a wastewater treatment facility. This water is then treated and reused.

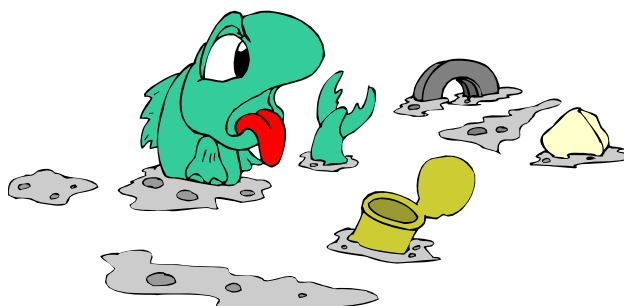
Stormwater on the other hand is the water that falls on our roof and paved areas around our homes and flows into the stormwater system via gutters and drains. Unlike wastewater, this water is not treated.

The stormwater and wastewater systems are separate because the flood of water in heavy storms would overload the wastewater system. Illegal connections of stormwater to the sewerage system cause problems for other homeowners and water authorities.

What pollutes stormwater?

Stormwater collects any material that lies in our streets. It picks up a variety of pollutants that enter directly into our creeks, streams, rivers and bays. This water carries untreated pollution such as:

- Litter, including plastic bags and bottles
- Detergents from washing the car
- Nutrients from fertilisers
- Garden waste including soil and grass clippings
- Chemicals & oil from roads



Point & non-point source pollution

Sources of stormwater pollutants such as sewerage outfalls and chemical spills are called point sources of pollution. This is because these pollutants come into our waterways at a particular point.

Other sources such as gross pollutants (vegetation & dog faeces), surface runoff (oil & brake fluid) or agricultural runoff (fertilizers, herbicides & pesticides) are called non-point sources of pollution. This is because these sources can get into a water body at a variety of points. Because of this, non-point sources of stormwater pollution are difficult to directly control and highlights the fact that the closer to the source we deal with the problem, the better off we are.

Stormwater fact file

- ◆ More than 80% of litter in waterways originates from irresponsible disposal around shopping malls, milk bars and factories
- ◆ Most of the rubbish found in these areas is plastic, foam and paper which are non-degradable and takes many years to breakdown (some plastic bags take hundreds of years)
- ◆ Leaves, twigs and garden refuse account for about three quarters of all stormwater gross pollutants
- ◆ Plastic bags can be fatal when eaten by aquatic animals who mistake them for food.

What can I do?

Local councils are generally responsible for controlling and maintaining stormwater systems. However, caring for our waterways is the responsibility of everyone living in the catchment. Anything that is dropped in the street can be washed into a stormwater drain and carried into our rivers

Rubbish racks, settling ponds and constructed wetlands are ways in which councils reduce the amount of untreated stormwater getting into the waterways. More importantly, though, action is needed at the start of the stormwater process .

Reducing use of over-packaged items and disposing of rubbish in the right place are some of the best things you can do to make sure you're not contributing to our urban stormwater problem.

Stormwater tips

- Always use bins provided at school or if somewhere without bins, take rubbish home. Think about where your rubbish will end up when disposing of it.
- Never put oil, paint or chemicals down the drain and make sure the car doesn't leak oil or fuel.
- Providing water restrictions allow you to, wash the car with a bucket of water on a grassed area and use the minimum



amount of detergent

- Sweep paths and collect the rubbish disposing of it in the bin rather than hosing or sweeping into the gutter. Keep soil on garden beds, don't wash it down the gutter.



Clean drains to our river project

Goulburn Broken Waterwatch at Goulburn Valley Water has developed the "Clean Drains to Our River" project. This project involves the stencilling of stormwater side entry pits as a means of raising awareness in the local community of stormwater issues.

Drain stencilling involves the painting of signs such as 'To Goulburn River' or 'The drain is just for rain' onto stormwater pit coverings. These are the inlets where stormwater disappears off the street. By making people more aware of their local drains, we hope that this will highlight the amount of rubbish and pollutants eventually being washed into our waterways.



For further information

Please visit the Goulburn Valley Water website: www.gvwater.vic.gov.au

or contact a Goulburn Valley Water Education Officer:

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