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## **Hendersonville News**

### **Untreated stormwater can exacerbate pollution**

**Diane Silver**

**Mud Creek Watershed**

Stormwater is in the news, on the ground and on the airwaves. We'll be hearing more and more about stormwater in the coming months and years, so here is a basic introduction:

Stormwater is the water that runs off streets, parking lots, rooftops and other hard surfaces whenever it rains. Storm drains or ditches carry run-off directly to nearby streams, without passing through a water treatment plant.

Stormwater run-off is a problem because it carries pollutants from the surrounding landscape into our waterways. Metals, salts, oil, etc., from roads and parking lots; fertilizers and other products from golf courses and landscaping; pet waste; grease, soap and chemicals that may get dumped out the back door; anything that gets deposited on the pavement or sidewalk eventually ends up in a nearby stream.

In addition to chemical and organic wastes, tons of dirt gets carried by stormwater run-off. In fact, sediment in streams is the No. 1 water pollutant in Western North Carolina today.

Many pollutants get into creeks through unofficial connections to the stormwater system. Storm drains run directly to creeks and streams without any filtering or treatment. All drains in homes and businesses should be connected to a municipal sewer system or a septic system. But many are connected instead to the storm drain pipes. These connections are called illicit discharges. They may be unintended, and can be easily fixed, once they are identified.

All these pollutants that get carried by stormwater run-off are called non-point source pollutants because they don't come from any single point of origin. Non-point source pollution is the greatest threat today to our nation's waters.

In an effort to address this prevalent source of water pollution, the Federal Clean Water Act requires local communities to manage stormwater run-off and to control non-point source pollutants. This is done through creation and implementation of local Stormwater Management Plans. Phase II of the law covers smaller cities and towns. Within the Asheville urbanized area these are: Hendersonville, Laurel Park and Fletcher, in Henderson County; Biltmore Forest, Asheville, Black Mountain, Montreat, Woodfin and Weaverville in Buncombe County; and Waynesville, Canton and Clyde in Haywood County. As such, these municipalities have been dubbed "Phase II Communities." Some county governments may also be covered.

The law requires these local governments to submit a plan and receive a state permit to manage stormwater run-off, and to report regularly to the state on their adherence to their plan. Accordingly, the 12 Phase II communities in Western North Carolina have developed their plans in the last year, and received their stormwater permit.

In compliance with the law, each plan includes a variety of strategies for managing stormwater run-off. These include:

- Reducing run-off volume by adopting a post-construction run-off ordinance. This will encourage builders to include stormwater controls such as wetlands, grassed swales, porous pavement, cisterns, etc., in all new construction and re-development. These controls help direct rainwater into the ground, rather than running off the site and carrying pollutants. They are cost effective when included in the original construction design. Public input is welcomed as ordinances are drafted and go through the local legislative process.
- Controlling erosion and sediment run-off from construction sites.
- Mapping the stormwater drainage system and developing a program to identify and correct illicit discharges.
- Walking-the-talk by training municipal staff to use pollution prevention measures in all local government operations.

In addition to these strategies, a critical part of each plan includes public involvement: making information available to the public, offering opportunities for public participation in practical ways, and for public comment on the process of policy enactment and implementation. Watch for town newsletters, and check town Web sites for details on up-coming public forums and proposed ordinances.

In addition, many of these communities will be working to mark storm drains, a great project for Scout troops, school environmental clubs, churches and other service organizations. Also, Adopt-A-Stream programs in both Henderson and Buncombe Counties are always looking for additional volunteers to help clean up local waters. Contact ECO for Henderson County or RiverLink for Buncombe. Other opportunities for participation will be developed in the coming months.

Finally, we need everyone to do his or her part in reducing non-point source pollutants and minimizing stormwater run-off from their home or business. Here are a few things you can do to help:

- Scoop up after your pet, even on the grass.
- Make sure your septic system is in good condition, and have it maintained regularly.
- Apply fertilizers and other garden products sparingly. If anything ends up on a hard surface, sweep it back into the grass or dirt.
- Plant, mulch or contain any areas of bare soil.
- Never dump anything down a storm drain. "Only rain down the drain."
- Consider installing a rain garden, rain barrel, porous pavement or other landscape feature to capture run-off from your roof and driveway.
- Make sure your business disposes of all liquid and solid waste appropriately. Make sure dumpsters are covered, and never dump anything, liquid or trash, on the

ground or pavement.

- If you use chemicals, oil, solvents, etc., store them in good quality containers. Only pour them in an area that has containment structures, such as a berm around the area, to catch spills.
- If you notice an illicit discharge, something entering or draining from a storm drain that isn't rainwater, contact your local municipality.

Note: not every municipality has established a stormwater hotline yet, but they will in the coming months.

For more information on stormwater, problems, solutions, data, etc., visit the state stormwater site at [www.ncstormwater.org](http://www.ncstormwater.org).

To learn more about ordinances, public participation and reporting problems in the local area, visit your city or town's Web site, watch for newsletters or call the public information line. You may also call the Cooperative Extension Service at 697-4891, or visit [www.wncstormwater.org](http://www.wncstormwater.org).

Diane Silver is the Mud Creek Watershed Coordinator for Henderson County.