

Your Watershed: Storm Water Runoff - Preparing for the Rainy Season

By: The Russian River Watershed Association

When drops of rain turn to drizzle, and then to downpour the rain storms wash over the land carrying pollutants into nearby waterways. The water that flows across the land is called storm water runoff. In vegetated areas such as forests and fields rain water can seep into the ground and filter out pollutants. However, when rain falls on pavement or other hard surfaces it runs off and is conveyed by storm drain pipes and ditches directly to our creeks.

Many water pollution problems may be aggravated by pollutants from our streets and neighborhoods that are washed away by significant storms. Anything we spill, drop, or throw on the ground can enter a creek or river. Storm water runoff can carry pollutants from a variety of sources - oil and grease from cars which collects on pavement; litter and pet waste; fertilizers and pesticides from lawns or gardens; and sediment from construction activities. These pollutants which enter our streams can have a toxic effect on fish and wildlife. For example, excessive use of fertilizer can be carried off in storm water and cause algae blooms that remove oxygen from the water and create an environment that is detrimental to fish and other organisms.

With the rainy season approaching now is the time to prepare your home, neighborhood and place of business for the wet weather ahead. Here are a few simple actions you can take to prevent pollutants from entering our streams during the rainy season:

Home

- Pick up litter and yard clippings around your home. Compost or recycle debris in designated containers.
- Household chemicals should be used and stored properly.
- Use and store pesticides and fertilizers properly. Avoid applying these chemicals if rain is in the forecast and try to use non-toxic products on your landscape.
- Clean up pet waste and dispose of it in your trash container.
- Clean out your pickup truck bed and remove trash daily: trash left in the back of your pickup can easily blow out onto the street.
- Participate in a cleanup effort to collect garbage along a roadway or creek.

Business

- Properly store hazardous materials according to hazardous materials storage regulations.
- Check your dumpster for leaks and ask for a replacement if necessary.
- Clean up automotive leaks/spills with kitty litter or other absorbent material and sweep it up before it rains.
- Schedule a sweeper to clean your parking lot before the rains begin.

- Sweep—don't hose or wash dirt and debris from sidewalks and walkways.

This article was authored by Janice Gilligan of the Sonoma County Permit and Resources Management Department on behalf of RRWA. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.