

Ever see someone pour motor oil into a storm sewer?



Use the nearest storm drain to dispose of grass clippings with the leaf blower? Did you ever wonder where it all ends up?

Galveston Bay. What you put into the storm drain system flows directly into our bayous and ultimately into Galveston Bay. If storm water gets contaminated, then that's how it stays. **Storm water receives no treatment.**

Rain is a fact of life in Houston, be it a small shower or a hurricane. Urban storm water can be contaminated with

pesticides, fertilizers, animal droppings, trash, food wastes, and automotive by-products. These pollutants are part of the urban environment. Storm water runoff that flows over streets, parking lots, construction sites and industrial facilities can carry these pollutants into local bayous, channels and ditches. In the Houston area there are separate systems for sanitary waste and storm water. The sanitary sewer system collects wastewater from toilets, showers, and sinks which are then sent to a treatment plant. In contrast, storm water runoff is **not** treated and may carry pollutants directly to our waterways. ■

Storm Water Under Construction

Here in Houston and Harris County, we are no strangers to construction. Whether it is the latest road re-paving, new highway ramps or new home building, construction has become the norm in our every day lives. We have many thoughts about how construction affects our daily lives, but rarely do we realize the huge impact that construction has on the health of our local waterways.



Essentially, here's what happens when water flows over a construction site and into the storm water drainage system. Roads and buildings are often constructed with toxic or hazardous materials such as solvents, asphalt, or paints. If these materials are not properly contained, then during a rainfall the pollutants can run off the site, into the storm drain, into our area bayous and rivers and ultimately, Galveston Bay. The combination of construction debris and sediment creates a downstream dumping ground, chokes stream channels, and disturbs the environment for local wildlife. Storm water receives no treatment.

Fortunately, storm water discharges from construction activities are highly regulated by the federal and state government as well as Harris County and the City of Houston, but it is important for all of us to be aware of the condition of construction sites around our home and work communities.

You can help to ensure that proper measures are being taken to control the amount of debris that enters our bayous and lakes. If the health of our waterways is protected, our quality of life is improved. We can happily enjoy our bayous and go boating and swimming in our local communities.

If you have concerns about a construction site in your community, please call 311 if the site is inside the City of Houston or 713-956-3000 for Harris County residents. ■



Want to be YardWise?

YardWise is a FREE annual course available to all Harris County residents. Participants attend classroom sessions as well as receive field instruction. Lectures, slides, videos, and hands-on demonstrations feature such topics as: *Backyard Composting - Correct Application of Lawn Chemicals - "Don't Bag It" Plan - Integrated Pest Management - Less Toxic Alternatives - Mulching & Grasscycling - Vermi-Composting - WaterSmart - Xeriscaping.*

If you are interested in participating in the YardWise Program, please contact Herman Sanders at 713-290-3000 or log on to our website at www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org to find out the date of the next scheduled course. ■

Illicit Discharges

Illicit discharges are releases of pollutants or wastes to the storm drain system. These include the dumping of motor vehicle fluids, sewage, household hazardous wastes, grass clippings, leaves, and animal wastes. Levels of contamination from these illicit discharges have been shown to be high enough to significantly degrade water quality and threaten aquatic, wildlife, and human health. Citizen reporting can be a highly effective tool for finding these illegal releases. Because illicit discharges occur at unpredictable times, citizens are often able to observe problems and report them at the moment they occur.



- Please contact us if you observe or detect:
- Suspicious dumping of liquids, grass clippings, leaves, or any other item
 - A strong odor coming from the storm drain
 - Dead or stressed fish or aquatic animals
 - Leaky septic systems
 - Sedimentation from construction sites
 - Overflowing manhole
 - Dumping of animal wastes

- Be prepared to give the following information:
- Location
 - Source of pollution, if known
 - Who is responsible, if known
 - Any other relevant information

City of Houston residents call 311; Harris County residents call 713-920-2831. **You may remain anonymous.** ■

Household Hazardous Waste (HHW)

HHW includes ordinary products such as paints, stains and varnishes, cleaners, polishes, automotive lubricants and coolants, pesticides and fertilizers. Even certain electronics such as televisions and computer monitors contain hazardous components. Items that have the words "warning", "danger", "toxic", "corrosive", "irritant", "flammable" or "caution" on their labels are considered HHW. These items become waste when they are no longer usable or no longer wanted.

The average American household generates 15 pounds of HHW annually. Our homes contain an average of three to eight gallons of hazardous materials in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, and workshops.

The best strategy to relieve the environmental impact of household hazardous waste on our waterways and landfills is to implement the four "Rs" Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rebuy and using less toxic alternatives.

For information on HHW disposal and recycle services provided by the City of Houston and Harris County log on to www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org. ■

The Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Mobile Unit

What is the HHW Mobile Unit?

It is a team of trailers that will allow Harris County to conduct small, localized events designed to transport hazardous household items such as lawn and garden chemicals, paint products, household chemicals, and automotive fluids to a HHW facility for proper disposal. The mobile unit will make the collection of HHW from rural areas more economical than hiring an outside vendor to provide collection and disposal services for County residents.



By making collection events more accessible to residents of Harris County they'll be given the opportunity to more frequently dispose of their household hazardous materials. The mobile unit will be able to service 75-100 households per event.

Residents can request the mobile collection unit through their Home Owners Associations, Civic Clubs, churches, or apartment complexes. Community groups should provide a community/neighborhood contact person for the proposed event to the Harris County Storm Water Quality Section.

Most mobile collection unit events will be scheduled on Saturdays from 9 AM to 12 PM. It's a first-come, first-serve basis until the mobile unit reaches capacity. Certain items that can not be accepted includes, business waste, medical waste, ammunition or explosives, compressed gas cylinders, used electronics, tires, refrigerators, freezers or other large appliances.

Harris County expects to have a fully functioning mobile unit for use by December 2006. A news conference is being planned to unveil Harris County's newest team members.

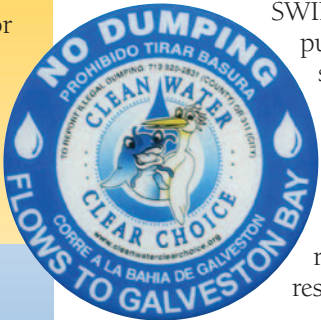
To find out when the HHW mobile unit will be in your neighborhood or to request an event log on to www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org or call 713-290-3000. ■

Storm Debris Management after a Severe Storm

Following severe storms a lot of waste is generated. It is important for homeowners to separate non-hazardous items such as carpet and furniture from hazardous materials such as paint, oil, and pesticides. For information on disposal of hazardous wastes during these times call 713-290-3000. ■



Storm Water Inlet Marking Program (SWIM)



SWIM is an environmental public education program sponsored by Harris County and the City of Houston. Its goal is to raise awareness of storm water locations and issues, and encourages residents to protect water resources.

More than 20,000 storm drains have already been marked, but the City of Houston and Harris County would like to have every storm water drain in this area to be marked to deter residents from dumping trash and chemicals into the waterways. The SWIM program is open to any individual, group or community that would like to help place the Clean Water Clear Choice logo on storm drains and sewer openings. To help, you can obtain information and order SWIM program kits by visiting www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org or calling 713-290-3000. ■

Reusing/Recycling Paints

Painters work with a variety of materials in their business, and it is illegal to dump any of these materials into storm drains.

Penalties for improper disposal are severe and include fines, incarceration, and financial responsibility for clean-up costs. By disposing of hazardous paint waste properly you can help protect our drinking water and the aquatic life in our local waterways.

The first choice for many paint and paint-related products, when safe to do so, is to completely use, recycle, or share with someone who can use it completely. Never discard paint onto the ground or down a drain or storm sewer. ■



THIS IS NOT A GARBAGE CAN.

City, County, State Penalties for Dumping and Polluting

Hazardous Waste Dumping Criminal Offenses and Penalties

- Texas Water Code, Section 7.162
- A person intentionally or knowingly transports, stores, or disposes any hazardous waste, without a manifest or without all required permits.
- Individuals – imprisonment up to 10 years and/or a \$1,000 to \$50,000 fine.
- Corporations – \$1,000 to \$250,000 fine.

Used Oil Dumping Criminal Offenses and Penalties

- Texas Water Code, Section 7.176.
- A person intentionally discharges used oil or knowingly disposes of or otherwise handles any used oil within the State of Texas in violation of the rules for used oil.
- Each day is a separate violation. Fine of not less than \$1,000 or more than \$50,000 and/or imprisonment up to five years.

Water Pollution Criminal Offenses and Penalties

- Texas Water Code, Section 7.145.
- A person intentionally or knowingly discharges or permits the discharge of a waste or pollutant into or adjacent to water in the state that causes

or threatens to cause water pollution without strict compliance with all required permits or other authorization. Water in the state includes drainage ditches, and storm water sewers.

- Each day is a separate violation.
- Imprisonment up to five years and/or a fine up to \$100,000.

Endangerment Criminal Offense and Penalty

- Texas Water Code, Sections 7.152-4
- Imprisonment up to ten years and/or a fine up to \$500,000.
- Corporation: Fine up to \$250,000.

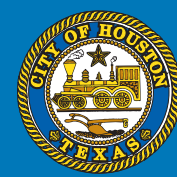
Local and State Administrative and Civil Penalties for Non-Compliance with Storm Water Laws and Regulations

- Harris County's Local Regulations – up to \$1,000 per day per violation
- City of Houston's Local Ordinances – Maximum of \$2,000 per day per violation
- Texas Water Code, Section 7.052 – up to \$10,000 per day per violation
- Texas Water Code, Section 7.102 – up to \$25,000 per day per violation



BE A PART OF THE SOLUTION.

For more information about local storm water quality programs visit: www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org or call 713-290-3000.



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What Should You Do With Household Hazardous Waste?

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