



What is storm water?



Storm water or rain water, flows into the storm drains you see at street corners or into roadside ditches. Any pollutants that storm water comes into contact with can be carried into our local bayous, lakes, rivers, and ultimately Galveston Bay.

The most common pollutants are:

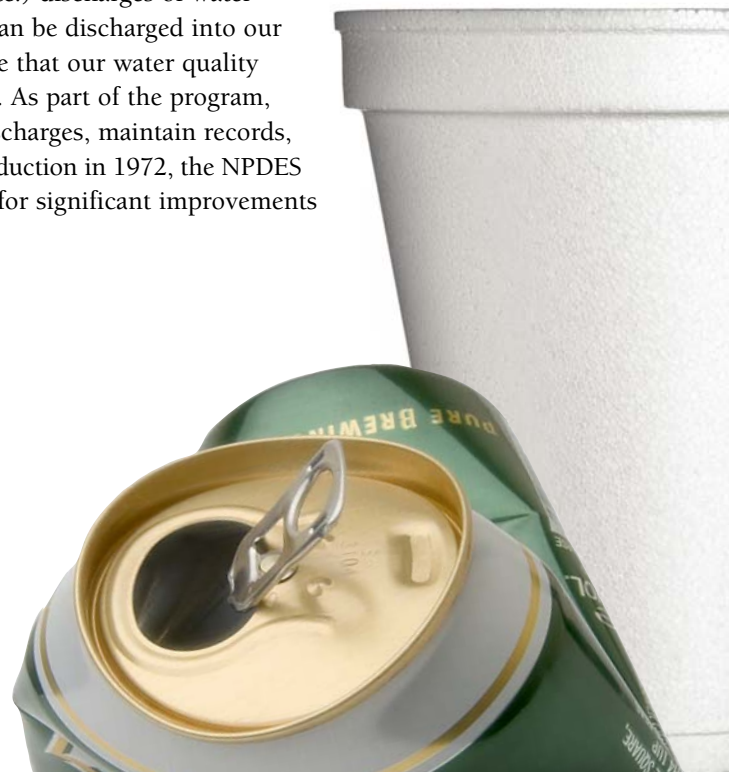
- trash (fast-food wrappers, cigarette butts and Styrofoam cups)
- toxins (used motor oil, antifreeze, fertilizer, pesticides, sewage overflow and pet waste)

These pollutants are picked up as water from rain, garden hoses, or sprinklers, etc. drains from streets, lawns, construction sites and industrial facilities and then enters the storm drain system. From there, this “toxic soup” flows untreated through a massive system of pipes and open channels straight to our waterways.

Basically, anything dumped or dropped on the ground or in the storm drain contributes to storm water pollution, and unfortunately, much of this is not biodegradable and can be harmful to marine life and makes recreational waters unhealthy for everyone!

How does the NPDES Permit Program help storm water?

The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program was established by the federal government to control point-source (storm drains, ditches, etc.) discharges of water pollution. By putting limits on what can be discharged into our waterways, the NPDES helps to ensure that our water quality and people's health are not put at risk. As part of the program, permittees are required to monitor discharges, maintain records, and file periodic reports. Since its introduction in 1972, the NPDES permit program has been responsible for significant improvements to our Nation's water quality.





Our Programs and Our Purpose



Urban storm water runoff is a serious concern because storm water runoff may be contaminated with pesticides, fertilizers, animal droppings, trash, food wastes, automotive by-products and other toxic substances that are part of the urban environment. To address the issue of storm water quality, Harris County and the City of Houston have implemented a comprehensive program to raise awareness of storm water quality, and to help

change behaviors that contribute to the pollution of our waterways. A major focus of the program is the control and elimination of storm water pollution.

Our Programs are aimed at:

- Prohibiting illegal dumping and disposal of pollutants
- Monitoring and analyzing storm water
- Promoting the proper management of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers

To support these objectives, a wide-ranging Public Education Program has been developed to communicate the importance of:

- Litter prevention
- Proper management of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers
- Public reporting of illicit discharges
- Proper management of household hazardous wastes
- Minimizing contaminated runoff from new developments and re-developments
- Minimizing contaminated runoff from construction sites



This public education component of our efforts includes the following activities:

- Speakers Bureau
- Community Events and Outreach
- Public Workshops and Seminars
- City and County Employee Training
- School Education





Storm Water Quality Begins at Home



Many of the products we use in our homes and throw away are actually similar to the hazardous waste produced by business and industry. If dumped into a storm drain, hazardous wastes such as paints, cleaners, polishes, automotive products, pesticides and herbicides flow directly into our bayous, rivers and finally Galveston Bay. The results can be deadly to plants, wildlife and our recreational areas.

You can help make a difference. Start by following the simple steps below and you can greatly help to reduce the amount of harmful pollutants that may be entering our waterways.

Use Environmentally Safe Products

Many pesticides have safe, chemical-free organic alternatives. By using non-toxic methods, you reduce the amount of dangerous chemicals that flows off of lawns and into storm drains. Lawn and garden products may contain harmful chemicals if disposed of improperly. To safely dispose of leftover herbicides and pesticides chemicals, please visit our website or call 713-290-3000.

Properly Dispose of Your Household Hazardous Waste

Household Hazardous Waste is typical household products that should not be disposed of by throwing it in the trash. These items include unused or leftover paint, pesticides, cleaners and other chemicals. There are several permanent locations throughout the City of Houston where residents can take these items or you may attend Harris County One-Day Collection Events held throughout the year where they can be safely disposed of. For a current listing of collection sites or events nearest you, log on to our website or call 713-290-3000.

Recycle Everything You Can!

Landfill space (where all our trash goes) is rapidly filling up and we can greatly reduce the need for having to find precious, open land for additional capacity. Open land can be better suited for parks or natural habitat for wildlife and much of what we throw away can easily be recycled!

Don't Litter!

Simple enough? Everything dropped, tossed, spilled or discarded onto streets will eventually make its way into the storm drain system and ultimately, Galveston Bay!





Frequently Asked Questions

We have received thousands of inquiries concerning storm water quality and have compiled a list of the most commonly asked questions to provide you with important information “at a glance”.

What is storm water?

Storm water, or rain water drains into storm sewers found at street corners or the low points on the sides of city streets. Unlike the water that we use inside our homes, storm water receives no treatment.

What is the purpose of a storm drain system?

Its purpose is to prevent flooding of streets and highways by quickly and efficiently transferring rainwater into our bayous, creeks, rivers and Galveston Bay. When a storm drain gets clogged with garbage of any kind, the water can back up during a severe storm, flood the streets and perhaps even flood your home.

What's the difference between a storm water drainage system and a sewer system?

The sanitary sewer system collects household wastewater from toilets, showers and sinks. The wastewater is sent to a treatment plant prior to discharge to the receiving stream. In contrast, storm water is not treated and may carry contaminants directly into our waterways.

Where does storm water go after it drains into a storm drain?

Storm water that enters the storm drains flows untreated into our bayous, rivers, and channels before flowing into Galveston Bay.

What contributes to storm water pollution?

Anything that is thrown into a storm drain or that is left on the street and is picked up by storm water contributes to storm water pollution.

More specifically, pollutants such as motor oil, pesticides, fertilizers, animal droppings, trash, food wastes, automotive by-products and other toxic substances. Industrial and commercial activities with uncovered outdoor storage or process areas, loading docks and equipment maintenance and washing areas may also contribute pollutants to urban runoff.





Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

How serious is the problem of storm water quality?

Very serious. The contaminated storm water can affect your life, vegetation, wildlife, commercial fisheries and restrict swimming areas.

Here are just a few examples of how contaminated storm water can adversely affect your life and your world.

Health: Storm water pollution poses a serious health risk to people swimming or fishing in our local bayous, rivers, lakes, etc.

Environment: Countless marine plants and animals living in our local waterways may become sick or die from contact with storm water pollution.

Neighborhoods: Clogged storm drains significantly decrease the quality of life in many neighborhoods throughout the City and County. These "nests" of trash and debris can attract mosquitoes, rats and cockroaches, create foul odors, and clog the storm drain system – affecting neighborhood aesthetics and property values, and create the potential for local flooding during heavy rain events.

What can you put down the storm drain?

Local ordinances and regulations prohibit anything other than uncontaminated water from entering the storm drain system.

What about yard trimmings and soil? They can't harm storm water can they?

Even though yard trimmings and soil are natural debris, when put in the storm drain they flow to our bayous, rivers and Galveston Bay where they can ruin the natural balance of the ocean and harm fish.

What can I do to help?

There are a lot of easy ways to help keep our water clean. Such as,

- Pick up after your pets and properly dispose of their waste in the trash
- Never pour pesticides, household paints, chemicals and motor oil on the ground or down a storm drain
- Take household toxic products to hazardous waste facilities
- Don't over water or over fertilize your lawn and use natural products when possible
- Wash your vehicle on your lawn instead of your driveway or street. Don't worry; it won't hurt your lawn!
- Visit our website at www.cleanwaterclearchoice.org or call 713-290-300 to see what community projects you can get involved with to help with this issue.

What do I do if I see someone dumping into a storm drain?

Educate that person about the hazards of contaminating storm water. Talk to your neighbors about what you have learned and encourage others to reduce, reuse and recycle whenever they can. If necessary, call the anonymous City of Houston Neighborhood Protection Complaint Line at 311. Or call the City of Houston Environmental Health Info. Line and Industrial Discharges at 713-640-4399. County residents may call Harris County Pollution Control at 713-920-2831.