

Newsletter Article

WHEN IT RAINS IT POURS...POLLUTANTS INTO OUR WATERWAYS Managing Stormwater During the Rainy Season



The rainy season is back. Time for umbrellas, raincoats, and....the first flush? The first flush is the first significant rainfall after a long period of dry weather. This rain flushes months of accumulated pollutants such as litter, lawn clippings, pesticides, motor oil, and pet waste from impervious surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, parking lots, and roadways down storm drains. Unlike water that flows through sewers (from sinks and toilets), water that flows through storm drains is not treated before entering our creeks, rivers, bays, and ocean.

It's particularly important during these wet-weather months to closely monitor your lawn-watering habits and adjust your watering schedule to reflect the weather conditions. During the rainy season, landscaped areas need less water. A heavy rainfall can eliminate the need for watering for up to two weeks. Therefore, increase the number of days between watering and reduce the amount of time sprinklers are operating. Also, shut off your sprinklers or use the rain-delay feature before and during rainy weather. When you avoid unnecessary watering, more rain can soak into your landscape and less runs off into the storm drain.

Impervious surfaces cover soil that would allow stormwater to soak into the ground. By not allowing stormwater to soak into the ground, these surfaces significantly increase the amount of water that runs off the land. Always on the move, water flows downhill, over and through the land picking up pollutants, and sending them to the nearest waterway. This is called stormwater pollution. However, by preparing for the rain, you can help reduce stormwater pollution and improve the health of our creeks, rivers, bays, and ocean.

Maintaining your landscape can help reduce pollution in our waterways. Preserve existing vegetation as much as possible. Plants are a natural, inexpensive and highly effective means for controlling runoff. Runoff slows down and loses much of its force when it reaches vegetation, which works as a filter, straining out sediment, debris and other pollutants.

Leaves may have collected in the rain gutters along your roof over the summer. Remove the debris from the gutter and place it in a green waste container before it rains and clogs your gutter. Also, direct downspouts and gutters to drain onto your lawn or plant beds where water will soak into the soil.

Erosion is another peril of heavy rain. To help prevent soil from leaving your property, examine your area carefully. Be aware of the slope, drainage patterns and soil types. If your property is prone to erosion, consider the following:

- Plant grass seed or other vegetation before the fall rains begin.
- Apply netting and straw mulch on steep slopes.
- Preserve trees and shrubs in streamside areas.
- Incorporate existing native vegetation into your landscape area.
- Direct water runoff away from areas subject to erosion.
- Minimize impervious surfaces such as concrete and asphalt and maximize the absorption capacity of your land through vegetation.

These measures can limit the flow of stormwater off your property and reduce the amount of pollutants entering the storm drain. To further reduce and prevent pollutants from entering the storm drain, place yard trimmings in a green waste container, pick up litter, maintain your vehicle and don't over-fertilize or overwater your lawn.

Do your part! Remember, the Ocean Begins At Your Front Door. For more information about what you can do to prevent water pollution or to report a water pollution problem, contact the Orange County Stormwater Program at 1-877-89-SPILL or visit www.ocwatersheds.com.