

Litter, Storm Water and YOU!

Everyone knows litter is an unsightly health hazard. However, many of us do not realize that litter on the ground is also going to pollute our water. Storm water systems are designed to take rainfall into the waterways. With the run off are carried trash, litter, and chemical waste. The nature of modern cities, with their extensive pavement, results in litter that ends up in storm water systems. Whether someone throws a cup out a car window, cleans paintbrushes on the driveway, dumps an auto ashtray at a curb, or drops a candy wrapper on the ground, the result is washed, untreated, into storm water systems and then into our waterways and onto our shorelines. Litter in storm water systems impacts people, animals, fish, and plants.

The impact of litter and chemicals in our waterways is devastating: fish are being poisoned. They and other animals that depend on the waterways for their food can become entangled in or suffocate from litter while searching for food. Litter in the waterways can reduce oxygen to levels that suffocate plants and fish that are found in rivers and streams. These conditions, in turn, affect the quality of the water we drink and the water that is part of many summer activities.

Much of the litter washed into the waterways does not break down. This litter then washes up on the shoreline, posing a further health hazard and danger to people and animals on shore. This litter is ugly and dangerous. Broken glass and shattered plastic can result in cuts and wounds which can become infected, especially if the water quality is poor. Diseases can spread to people directly and indirectly as contaminated water enters the food chain. There is also a cost associated when systems must be cleaned and repaired and health issues must be treated.

Worldwide, the effects of litter on water are a concern with studies being done to determine the effect of litter in our storm water systems as well as how to improve the effectiveness of these systems and the quality of our water. However, since this problem begins with us, we can help with the solution.

How? Don't litter -- put trash in an appropriate receptacle. Recycle. If you see litter, pick it up and throw it away. Participate in local clean up days. If you see an area that needs to be cleaned up get a group of neighbors together and clean it up. Be proactive. Don't throw paint, motor oil, and other hazardous substances in the trash or wash them into the ground or down the gutters. Save your hazardous materials – bring them to the hazardous waste days that are offered by the Town.

Remember: if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem!