

Making a Challenging Issue a Bit Simpler to Understand

Regulated MS4s, SUA, CSO, bioretention ... filtering through stormwater terminology can be quite a challenge but when all is said and done, it boils down to a simple message: we all need to work together to protect local water resources.

It's not difficult to understand that preventing water pollution is easier and less expensive than dealing with the impacts after it occurs. What's at stake when our waters become polluted? Among other things, our health, aquatic habitat, recreation opportunities, wildlife biodiversity, and many aesthetic benefits associated with clean water resources.

There are many pollutants carried in stormwater runoff. Here in Central New York, phosphorus from lawn fertilizers and sediment from lawns, gardens, construction and home improvement projects are major contributors to water quality impairments. Others include pathogens and bacteria from pet and animal waste, and toxic materials such as gasoline, oil, solvents and other common household and automotive chemicals. When rain and snowmelt washes these pollutants into our local lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands, the impacts can include increased aquatic weed growth and algal blooms, some of which can be harmful to aquatic life and human health. Other less visible impacts include the loss of aquatic habitat and degradation of drinking water quality. With the increasing frequency of intense storms, runoff events are becoming more frequent. As a result, associated impacts including streambank erosion, flooding, and damage to municipal infrastructure and personal property are also on the rise.

Because stormwater is a part of the natural system, it's easy to think of it as harmless. In reality, stormwater runoff is the number one contributor to water quality problems in the nation and is responsible for causing significant damage to public infrastructure. To address this reality, the Phase II Stormwater Program, a federally mandated regulatory program under the Clean Water Act, was implemented across NYS in 2003. The program addresses stormwater pollution from construction activities and municipal storm sewer systems (MS4s). Typical components of MS4s include open and closed pipes and drainage ditches, curbs and gutters, and catch basins used to collect and convey stormwater away from our roads and into nearby surface waters, such as lakes and streams.

The Town of Clay operates an MS4 system and is regulated under the Stormwater Phase II program. As a regulated MS4 community, the *[insert name of municipality]* is required to manage the volume and quality of stormwater that flows through its MS4. In the past few years, the area subject to these regulations has expanded as a result of population growth as documented in the 2010 Census of Population.

To help curb the cost of complying with stormwater regulations, Clay is working with other regulated MS4 communities in Central New York as a member of the CNY Stormwater Coalition. The Coalition provides a mechanism for reducing duplicative compliance efforts and sharing common program costs. The Coalition is administered by the CNY Regional Planning and Development Board on behalf of its 29 members.

Clay officials have also implemented pollution prevention practices in their day-to-day operations. Town/Village law requires developers to do the same on all new construction projects. However, to be truly effective, stormwater management and water resource protection needs to be a community-wide effort that includes the participation of homeowners, local community groups, and the general public. Simple actions such as picking up after your dog, participating in stream clean-up events, or installing green infrastructure practices (rain gardens, tree plantings, vegetated buffers, etc.) can make a big difference in local water quality. Community associations, school groups and religious organizations are encouraged to distribute stormwater information when conducting local events that improve water quality.

and to report these events to their municipal representatives. If you are organizing an event, the CNY Regional Planning and Development Board can provide educational materials and tracking tools to help you help your community.

Talk with your municipal representatives to learn more about stormwater management, or visit the CNY Stormwater Coalition website at www.cnyrpd.org/stormwater for more information.