

Even though summer time is supposed to be our dry months, but we've actually received some beneficial rains lately. With that, there are some things we need to keep in mind regarding storm water. Fort Sill actually has two storm water permits that we maintain and there are some parameters that we legally have to comply with. Believe it or not, there are some actual good things that we've done in the past to try and minimize storm water pollution and infiltration to the sanitary sewer system.

There are actually two sewer systems here on Fort Sill. The sanitary sewer system takes the used potable water away from buildings and then there is the storm sewer system, which takes rain water away from the streets, buildings and other areas so that it doesn't get flooded. AWE, our water contractor, has been active in identifying areas that storm water can enter our sanitary sewer lines and have been replacing/rebuilding old storm water infrastructures. AWE/DPW also identify older storm water sewer inlets that have either collapsed or in need of repair and then program money for those projects so that those issues can be resolved. Since Fort Sill has been around for such a long time, there are a lot of older infrastructure issues that need to be repaired or replaced. It's not done overnight, but eventually, things will get completed.

In both urbanized and industrial areas throughout Fort Sill, much of the land surface in the cantonment area is covered by buildings and pavement, which do not allow rain and snowmelt to soak into the ground. Instead, most developed areas rely on storm drains to carry large amounts of runoff from roofs and paved areas to nearby waterways. Storm sewer systems concentrate runoff into smooth, straight conduits. This runoff gathers speed and erosional power as it travels either above or below ground. When this runoff leaves the storm drains and empties into a stream, its excessive volume and power blast out streambanks, damaging streamside vegetation and wiping out aquatic habitat. There are actually a few projects going on right now to fix some of these damaged areas. Increased storm flows can carry sediment loads from construction sites and other denuded surfaces and eroded streambanks.

Fort Sill requires that every construction project be reviewed by the Environmental Quality Division so that we may address storm water issues and requirements. Any construction projects over one acre in total size, is required to obtain an actual storm water construction permit through the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) and cannot terminate that permit until it has met certain requirements and inspected by a ODEQ regulator that actually comes to the site.

Storm water will often carry higher water temperatures from streets, roof tops, and parking lots, which are harmful to the health and reproduction of aquatic life. As storm water flows over these areas, it picks up debris, chemicals, dirt and other pollutants. Anything that enters the storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the water bodies that are used for swimming, fishing and sometimes, drinking water. Polluted runoff is the nation's greatest threat to clean water quality.

By practicing healthy habits, common pollutants like pesticides, pet waste, grass clippings and automotive fluids can be kept off the ground and out of storm water. Below is a list of a few healthy habits that can help lower the amount of pollutants entering the storm sewer system.

Vehicles and Garages:

Use the AAFES car wash instead of washing the car in the housing areas. The AAFES car wash facilities drain their water directly into the sanitary sewer system and not into the storm water system. Check your car and other machinery for leaks and spills. Make repairs as soon as possible and clean up spilled fluids with an absorbent material like kitty litter or sand. Do not rinse the spills into the storm drain. Even rinsing off the side walk or drive way will result in the water eventually finding its way into the storm water system. Remember, one drop of oil can pollute 1000's of gallons of water. Vehicle fluids are the number one surface water quality problems nationwide.

Lawn and Garden

Sweep up yard debris rather than rinsing them off the sidewalk or drive way. Too many leaves and yard clippings can take oxygen out of water and suffocate the plants and fish that need oxygen to breath.

Don't overwater the lawn. Water during the cool times of the day and don't let water run off into the storm drain.

Use mulch for landscaping projects to prevent pollutants from blowing or washing off the yard and into the storm drain system.

Vegetate bare spots to prevent soil erosion.

General

Purchase and use nontoxic, biodegradable, recycled and recyclable products whenever possible.

Use hazardous substances like paints, solvents and cleaners in the smallest amounts possible. Clean up spills immediately. If your PCS'ing, you can drop off these products to Bldg. 2515, Environmental Quality Division and it won't cost you a dime.

Remember to pick up pet waste and dispose of it properly. Pet waste is not a fertilizer.

Pick up street litter and loose trash so that it can be prevented from blowing into storm drain inlets. Keep trash bins covered at all times as the Oklahoma winds can easily blow the trash out of the bins.

Should you require guidance, please call the Environmental Quality Division office at 442-3266.

