

Where Does the Stormwater Go?

When it rains, snows, or sleets, where does the runoff water from roads, roofs, and driveways go? It might surprise you that this water does not go into a water treatment plant, unlike water from your toilets, sinks, and showers. In fact, this water flows right to stormwater management ponds, streams, and/or the Chesapeake Bay.

Most roadways contain a **storm drainage system** that collects the runoff water and water that was not absorbed in the ground. A storm drainage system is defined by Fairfax County as “A network of structures, channels, and underground pipes that carry stormwater (rain water) to ponds, lakes, streams, and rivers.” These storm drainage systems can be found alongside sidewalks and in peoples’ yards. The water in these systems will either be routed or piped into a stormwater management pond or it will make its way to Prince William’s 1,000 mile network of streams and channels. These streams and channels make their way to larger water sources, such as the Occoquan River and the Potomac River. Eventually, the runoff water will be dumped into the Chesapeake Bay.

The issue with this system is that water isn’t the only thing that gets dumped into the bay. Water carries along with it sediments and nutrients from fertilizers, emissions from automobiles, and human trash and debris such as cigarette butts. Soil particles from construction sites also travel to storm drainage systems. These soil particles tend to have pollutants attached to them. All of these factors negatively affect the water quality and wildlife associated with the Chesapeake Bay.

To help with this problem, make sure you properly dispose of your trash, grass clippings, pet waste, engine oil, paint, household chemicals and other waste products. Do not dump items into a storm drainage network. If you have a storm drainage network on your property, make sure it is kept relatively clean from debris and soil particles. For further information, you can visit the following websites:

<http://www.pwconserve.org/issues/jan2003stormwater.html>,

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/utilities/stormdrains.htm>