

Information for Business Owners
May 25, 2016

If you own a business in the City of Walla Walla, we need your help and cooperation in our efforts to not further degrade and instead, improve the water quality of our rivers and creeks. The Walla Walla River and its tributaries such as Mill Creek are designated as water quality limited (degraded) by the State of Washington. Some of our local creeks exceed water quality standards for fecal coliform, pesticides, temperature and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). High levels of fecal coliform, which come from pet waste and failed septic systems, make fish, animals and people sick and can make swimming unsafe. Pesticides and PCBs can be toxic to aquatic life and cause cancer. Temperature is an issue because warmer water contains less oxygen which aquatic organisms need to survive.

Since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, pollution from industrial facilities has been substantially reduced making stormwater runoff one of the largest remaining sources of water pollution in the United States. Stormwater is rainfall or snowmelt that runs off the roofs of our houses, driveways, businesses, streets, parking lots, lawns and other surfaces. As stormwater flows over parking lots, it picks up fuel, oil, grease, antifreeze and other fluids that leak from cars and trucks. In addition, cars and trucks contribute sediment and heavy metals such as lead, zinc, copper and cadmium to stormwater runoff. In commercial business areas, stormwater can potentially carry a wide variety of harmful pollutants either produced or used on site.

Chapter 13.15 of the City of Walla Walla Municipal Code prohibits the discharge of any material other than clean, uncontaminated stormwater into the City storm drain system and/or surface and ground waters such as Mill Creek or any of the many other creeks running through the city. Prohibited contaminants listed in the code include, but are not limited to, garbage, trash, debris, petroleum products, paints, detergents, drain cleaners, pesticides, fertilizer, chlorinated swimming pool or spa wastewater, chlorine, bromine, other disinfectants, silt, sediment, concrete, and sewage.

The reason for this prohibition is that the materials listed above are pollutants that degrade water quality and can be toxic to fish and other aquatic life. Our storm drains flow untreated into the many creeks throughout the city or into the ground where they can adversely affect groundwater. Storm drains do NOT empty into sewer pipelines that carry wastewater from our sinks and toilets to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. For this reason, nothing other than stormwater may be discharged into the street or alley, gutter, storm drains, drywells, and surface or ground waters.

Oil, fuel and other petroleum products can suffocate fish and other aquatic organisms by coating their gills or other breathing surfaces, which prevents them from getting the oxygen they need to live. Sediment destroys spawning areas for steelhead, salmon and other fish by smothering eggs laid in the gravel. It also fills our storm drains requiring more frequent maintenance and settles out in our creeks which reduces their ability to carry water and potentially causes flooding and bank erosion. Heavy metals are toxic to aquatic life and are of particular concern because they have been shown to interfere with the ability of salmon and other migratory fish to find their way back upstream to their spawning streams. Fertilizer and grass clippings add excessive nutrients to our creeks, which can lead to algae blooms and reduced oxygen levels in slower moving water bodies. Pesticides can be toxic to aquatic life and cause cancer.

In general, nothing but clean rainwater or snowmelt may be placed, washed or allowed to flow into the street or into creeks. The following are several basic sources of stormwater pollution from businesses and what owners can do to help prevent and reduce it.

Facility Maintenance

- Wastewater from indoor cleaning operations may not be dumped or allowed to flow into the street or into creeks. Instead, it should be disposed of in the sanitary sewer unless it contains fats, oils or grease. These should be disposed of in the garbage and not down the sanitary sewer.
- Sidewalk and exterior building wash water may be allowed to flow into the street provided surfaces are swept first to remove as much dirt and debris as possible and detergents are not used.

Grounds Maintenance

- Grass clippings and other vegetative debris cannot be placed in the street or into creeks. It can block the proper drainage of stormwater in the gutter and storm drains causing ponding of water in the street which can be a traffic safety hazard.
- When mowing next to the street, don't direct the discharge chute towards the street and discharge grass clippings into the street.
- Care needs to be exercised when applying fertilizer and pesticides not to let any of this material get into the street. This is especially a concern with hand-held devices that broadcast these materials at some distance from the device. Also, avoid over-fertilizing as this can leach nutrients into the groundwater.
- When blowing off sidewalks and parking areas, don't blow the debris out into the street. Besides being unsightly and possibly a traffic hazard, this debris adds to the pollutant loading in our creeks.
- Also, you can help by keeping the lower branches of trees planted near the street trimmed back so the street sweeper can get in close to clean up debris along the curb.
- Dirt, sand, gravel, bark or other landscaping material may not be stockpiled or stored in the street. In addition, care needs to be exercised to prevent exposed soil, sand, gravel and other material from eroding into the street.

Parking Lot Maintenance

- Clean up all spills and leaks of fuel, oil, antifreeze or other fluids in parking areas with absorbent cloths or other absorbent material such as cat litter. Then, be sure to pick up and dispose of all used absorbent material properly in the garbage.

Garbage/Waste Disposal

- Garbage and waste material must be disposed of properly and may not be placed, washed or allowed to flow into streets, alleys, storm drains or creeks.
- Garbage cans or dumpsters located outdoors need to be kept under shelter, covered to keep out rainfall or in areas where runoff cannot flow into streets, alleys, storm drains or creeks.
- If garbage containing liquid residue is placed in these receptacles, liquids need to be drained as much as possible to prevent leakage.
- If liquid does leak out of garbage cans or dumpsters, it needs to be contained and cleaned up using absorbent material. Contact the Solid Waste Division at 527-4591 to replace leaking cans and dumpsters.

Vehicle Maintenance

- If the business has a fleet of vehicles (or just one vehicle), maintain and fix all leaking vehicles.

- Vehicles cannot be washed in the street or in locations where the wastewater runs off into city streets. This is because that wastewater not only contains detergents but also oil, grease and other vehicle fluids; sediment; and heavy metals such as lead, copper, zinc and cadmium that are washed off cars. Vehicles should be washed at commercial car washing businesses where the wastewater is disposed of in the sanitary sewer. Alternatively, they can be washed on grassy areas, gravel surfaces or other pervious surfaces where it can soak into the ground provided no wastewater runs off these areas into the street.

Stormwater Management Facility Maintenance

- On-site privately-owned stormwater management facilities such as catch basins, drywells, infiltration swales and retention basins must be adequately maintained to function as designed.
- Catch basins need to be cleaned when sediment is within six inches of invert of the pipe leading out of the catch basin.
- Drywells need to be cleaned when there is more than two feet of sediment in bottom.
- The City is responsible for maintenance of the stormwater system including 2,200 storm drains in the City. However, during a storm event, substantial amounts of debris are carried into the streets and down the gutters to the storm drains all at once. Often, this debris covers the drain grate causing ponding of water in the street which can be a traffic safety hazard. You can help by helping to keep the streets and gutters clean and free of debris and help to clear off storm drain grates when they become plugged.

Your cooperation in this matter will be appreciated. Be advised that violations of the above-referenced municipal code could result in fines, penalties or other remedies as provided by law. Please contact Brad Daly, City of Walla Walla Stormwater Coordinator at 509-524-4669 or email him at bdaly@wallawalla.gov if you have any questions.