

Information for Residents and Homeowners
May 25, 2016

If you live or own a home 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, alleys, parking lots, lawns and other surfaces. As stormwater flows over our streets, 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 residential areas, stormwater carries dirt, grass clippings and other vegetative debris, fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste, and soapy wastewater from car washing into the street, down our storm drains and directly into our creeks.

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, 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.

The following are several sources of stormwater pollution from residential properties and what residents and property owners can do to help prevent and reduce it.

Vehicle Maintenance

Maintain and fix all leaking vehicles. Clean up all spills and leaks of fuel, oil, antifreeze or other fluids 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. 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. If you change your own oil or other fluids,

make sure to use a drip pan and dispose of the waste fluid properly. Used motor oil and other fluids should be taken to the Household Hazardous Waste Facility at the Sudbury Regional Landfill where they will be disposed of without charge.

Car Washing

Cars or other 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. Detergents add excessive nutrients to our creeks, which can lead to algae blooms and reduced oxygen levels and kill aquatic life. Oil 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. 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.

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, driveways, gravel surfaces or other pervious surfaces where it can soak into the ground provided no wastewater runs off these areas into the street. If a driveway slopes to the street, you need to divert the water to the sides of the driveway into grassy or shrub beds where it can percolate into the ground without reaching the street.

RV Maintenance

Water from gray or black water storage tanks cannot be dumped in the street. This is because they contain detergents and raw sewage. Detergents add excessive nutrients to our creeks, which can lead to algae blooms and reduced oxygen levels and kill aquatic life. High levels of fecal coliform, which come from sewage, make fish, animals and people sick and can make swimming unsafe. Water from the holding tanks on your RV should be disposed of properly at a designated RV dump station.

Yard Waste

Grass clippings and other vegetative debris cannot be dumped 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. In addition, grass clippings and other vegetative debris add excessive nutrients to our creeks, which can lead to algae blooms and reduced oxygen levels in slower moving water bodies. Unbagged leaves may be placed in piles in the street only during the leaf collection season in the fall but an open pathway along the curb should be left for stormwater to pass down the gutter to the nearest storm drain. Other than that, yard waste should be disposed of in your green waste recycling container, taken to the Compost Facility at the Sudbury Regional Landfill or used to create your own compost on-site. When mowing next to the street, don't direct the discharge chute towards the street; instead, direct it back into the lawn. Also, when blowing off your driveway and sidewalk, don't blow the debris out into the street; instead, blow it back into your yard. Besides being unsightly and possibly a traffic hazard, this debris adds to the pollutant loading in our creeks.

Fertilizer and Pesticides

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. 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.

Dirt and Sediment

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. 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 reduce their ability to carry water and potentially cause flooding and increase bank erosion.

Pet Waste

Stormwater runoff from your lawn can carry fecal coliform into the street. 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. Pet waste on your property should be picked up and disposed of properly in a garbage can. When walking your dog, carry pet waste bags with you to pick up after your dog and dispose of the bag in the garbage.

Household Hazardous Waste

This should go without saying but household hazardous wastes must never be disposed of in the street or storm drain. This includes a wide variety of household products including soaps, detergents, ammonia, drain cleaners, degreasers, paint, dyes, stains, solvents, or any flammable or explosive material. These should all be taken to the Household Hazardous Waste Facility at the Sudbury Regional Landfill where they will be disposed of without charge.

Gutter and Storm Drain Maintenance

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. 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.

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@wallawallawa.gov if you have any questions.