Fact sheet - Stormwater

Stormwater is water that runs off hard surfaces in towns or cities. It creates a problem when pollution is collected from the ground and washed with the stormwater into our waterways via drains.

Three categories of stormwater pollution:

- *Litter (paper, plastic, packaging)*
- *Organic (leaves, grass clippings, soil and animal droppings)*
- *Chemical (detergents, oils, fuels, pesticides and fertilisers)*

Sewage is treated through a sewage system but stormwater generally flows untreated through a series of drains and directly into our waterways, ultimately reaching the ocean. It affects water quality, flora and fauna health, the visual amenity and recreational opportunities of waterways.

- 98% of rainfall in urban areas runs off hard surfaces as stormwater.
- Of all urban stormwater pollution, 70% consists of organic items, not litter as many expect.
- You only see 10% of the litter in a waterway as 90% is sinking below water levels out of sight.

What are the environmental impacts?

Litter gets caught in stream vegetation, clogs up waterways, looks unsightly and can take many years to break down and also be eaten by, or entangled with, aquatic fauna.

Although consisting of natural materials, organic pollution can add nutrients encouraging rapid growth of weeds and cause algal blooms. Organic debris uses up vital oxygen as it rots, sediment makes the water turbid, animal droppings contain nasty bacteria and lawn clippings can reshoot in streams adding to weed problems.

Chemical pollution is toxic to humans, plants and animals, fuels form oil films on water and detergents can reduce the waterproofing capabilities of aquatic animals.

Managing stormwater

Everyone in a community plays a vital role in managing stormwater using *reduce, reuse, recycle and rethink* strategies, such as:

- drinking from reusable container
- place rubbish & recyclables in correct bins
- pick up after domestic pets
- sweep gutters and driveways
- rake and compost fallen leaves,
- maintain vehicles
- wash vehicles on lawns
- limit pesticide and fertiliser use
- dispose of chemicals appropriately
- use barriers and vegetation to keep sediment on site, and
- watering gardens efficiently.

In the past, stormwater was considered a nuisance to be swept underground quickly and out of sight. Today urban stormwater is caught in tanks and used for car washing and irrigation of parks, gardens and wetlands, litter traps are installed on drain outlets and new housing developments are being designed using stormwater sensitive principles.

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