

Rising Waters

With all of the 'extra' rain we seem to be getting these days, one may wonder where all of this water is going. When the storms come our way, we see the rain rush quickly from our rooftops, driveways, parking lots and streets to the closest street drain. These drains are appropriately termed storm drains.

Many cities in the United States used combined sewers until the mid 1940's. These systems were designed to collect wastewater and stormwater in the same system and transport it to a treatment plant. During times of heavy rain, these systems were designed to overflow to prevent damage to the pipes. The overflow would discharge into the nearest body of water.

Since then, in a nationwide effort, wastewater pipes are being separated from stormwater drainage systems. The result of separating these sewer systems has been fewer releases of untreated wastewater to lakes and streams. However, other pollutants found in stormwater are no longer treated at the wastewater treatment plant. These pollutants accumulate between periods of rainfall, and then are washed down the storm drains during a rain event. They include substances such as motor oil from our vehicles, pet and animal wastes, fertilizers, and grass clippings from mowing our lawns. Since stormwater pipes are now directly routed to lakes and streams, these contaminants can have a significant impact on those waters.

Today's wastewater treatment plants are working hard to make our wastewater as clean as possible before it is discharged to the Grand River. In fact, the wastewater is now often cleaner than the Grand River itself. The primary cause of pollution today in the Grand River is not from wastewater plants or industry; it comes from the many smaller sources like the pollution from our storm sewers.

The Clean Water Act of 1972 set up the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The NPDES program has required some communities in Michigan to tackle the issue of stormwater pollution. A number of communities in Kent County have formed a committee that is working on cleaning up storm water pollution. This cooperative effort is actively seeking approaches to help citizens become 'stormwater savvy'. Your Kent/Ottawa Stormwater Education Committee would like to remind you to be storm water savvy and utilize the recycling programs, practice proper solid waste disposal and utilizing your free residential hazardous waste program. Never dump substances down your drain or storm drains! Instead call to dispose of hazardous waste items such as gas and paint thinner through your free county program and help prevent additional storm water pollution. Be sure to share your knowledge of these programs that are available to protect our precious resources! Please call the Kent County Resource Recovery program at (616) 336-2501 or 1-888-217-2850 for more information on programs available for county residents.

