

## **STORM AND SURFACE WATER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

### **What is Stormwater?**

Stormwater, or urban runoff, is rain or snow that falls on streets, parking areas, or rooftops. Since water cannot soak into the pavement or rooftops, it finds its way to a nearby storm drain, lake or river.

### **Why is Stormwater a Problem?**

Stormwater is a problem for two big reasons: pollution and flooding / erosion.

#### **Pollution**

During its travels to a storm drain, lake or river, the stormwater picks up all kinds of pollutants like dirt and oil from our cars, chemicals from our yards and bacteria from our pet's waste, and takes them all along for the ride. What most people may not know is that most storm drains head directly for our nearby lakes, rivers, and Puget Sound...without any treatment! The Washington Department of Ecology estimates that about one-third of all polluted waters in the state are polluted by stormwater runoff. The department found that virtually all surface waters in urban areas are degraded by stormwater runoff.

Polluted stormwater contaminates our waters, closes local shellfish growing businesses, and harms or kills fish and other wildlife. If stormwater runoff is not taken seriously, it also poses a threat to our drinking water supplies.

#### **Flooding / Erosion**

As more pavement and rooftops cover up the natural forest floor, the water has less and less area to move to. As it fiercely searches for a place to soak in, it often finds itself pooling in low areas and valleys flooding our homes and businesses and ripping through river banks much faster than nature intended. In addition, because less water soaks into the ground, drinking water supplies are not replenished and streams and wetlands are not recharged. This can lead to water shortages for people and inadequate stream flows for fish.

#### **How can you help?**

Here are five things you can do to help minimize the impacts from stormwater runoff:

- Always pick up your pet's waste and place it in the trash.
- If you use fertilizers in your yard, make sure to choose those that say "natural" or "slow-release" on the bag.
- Wash your car at a commercial car wash instead of in the street or in your driveway.
- Remember...only rain should go down the storm drain.
- Reduce impervious surfaces at home, like concrete driveways and patios.