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## **What is Stormwater, and why does it matter?**

Stormwater is the water produced by rain. This water flows over driveways, lawns, sidewalks, and other hard surfaces. In this process it picks up chemicals, dirt, and pollutants. The water flows into storm drains, or nearby bodies of water. Anything that is picked up by this water will go into nearby water bodies and pollute it. Nearby bodies of water are where cities often get their drinking water. Polluted runoff is the nation's greatest threat to clean water.

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## Rain Gardens

### **What are Rain Gardens?**

Rain gardens have two main functions. First, rain gardens help filter out impurities that might be present in the storm water run-off. For example, if a car has an oil leak and spills some oil on the road the next time it rains that oil will be swept up into the storm water run-off. If this run-off is captured by a rain garden the plants' root systems can filter out the environmentally harmful impurities. The second function of rain gardens is to act like water "speed bumps." When mass amounts of storm water run-off are flushed into a city's plumbing system it can cause overflows and other problems. A rain garden will collect a large amount of storm water run-off then slowly release it back into the ecosystem safely.

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### **Who can build a Rain Garden?**

Really anyone can build a rain garden. They are relatively easy and inexpensive to

install. Also, they are easy to maintain once they have been installed.

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### **Are Rain Gardens an eye sore?**

Rain gardens are actually very aesthetically appealing. A rain garden looks very much like a sunken garden and is comprised of only natural components.

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### **How Can I Help Clean Up Stormwater?**

#### **Vehicle and Garage**

Use a commercial car wash or wash your car on a lawn or other unpaved surface to minimize the amount of soapy water flowing into the storm drain

Check your car, boat, motorcycle, and other machinery and equipment for leaks and spills. Clean up spilled fluid with an absorbent material like kitty litter or sand and dispose of these properly.

Recycle used oil and other automotive fluids at participating service stations

Don't dump chemicals down the storm drain or in your trash

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#### **Lawn and Garden**

Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly. When necessary use recommended amounts. Try to put chemicals down when the forecast is not calling for rain. Select native plants and grasses that are drought and pest resistance. Native plants require less water, fertilizer and pesticides. Here is a [list](#) of native plants, and more [information](#) about Indiana's native plants

Sweep up yard debris rather than hosing down areas. Compost or recycle yard waste.

Don't over water your lawn. Water during the cool time of the day and don't let water run off into the storm drain.

Cover piles of dirt and mulch being used in landscaping projects to prevent these pollutants from blowing or washing off your yard. Vegetate bare spots in your yard to prevent soil erosion.

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#### **Home Repair and Improvement**

Before beginning an outdoor project, locate nearest storm drains and protect them from debris and other material.

Sweep up and properly dispose of construction debris such as concrete and

mortar.

Use hazardous substances in smallest amounts possible (paint, solvents, cleaners). Follow the directions on the label and clean up spills immediately. Purchase and use nontoxic, biodegradable, recycled, and recyclable products whenever possible.

Clean paint brushes in a sink, not outdoors. Filter and reuse paint thinner when using oil-based paints.

Properly dispose of excess paints through a household hazardous waste collection program, or donate unused paint to local organizations.

Reduce the amount of paved area and increase the amount of vegetated area in your yard. Use native plants in your landscaping to reduce need for watering.

Consider directing downspouts away from paved surfaces onto lawns and other measures to increase filtration and absorption of stormwater.

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### **Pet Care**

Picking up pet waste is important. Flushing pet waste is the best disposal method. Leaving waste on the ground increases risk of allowing harmful bacteria to wash into the stormwater.

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### **Swimming Pools**

Drain your swimming pool only when a test kit does not detect chlorine levels. Drain the pool or spa into the sanitary sewer system.

Properly store pool and spa chemicals to prevent leaks and spills, preferably in a covered area such as a shed.

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### **Septic System Use and Maintenance**

Have your septic system inspected by a professional at least every 3 years and have it pumped as necessary.

Care for the system drain-field. Do not drive or park vehicles on it. Plant only grass over and near the drain-field to avoid damage from roots.

Do not flush chemicals like paint, pesticide, oil, and antifreeze. Other items such as diapers, paper towels, and cat litter can clog the system and cause damage.

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