When rain falls or snow melts, much of the water that doesn’t soak into the ground runs off into rivers and lakes. This runoff water is carried away by a network of storm drains and pipes that empty directly into rivers and lakes. This runoff water is typically not treated at a treatment plant.

- **Stormwater runs off** impervious (hard) surfaces such as roofs and pavement.
- **Stormwater runoff** picks up soil, leaves, nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, motor oil, road salt, and a host of other pollutants in our parking lots, driveways and streets.
- **Sediment clouds the water** in streams and lakes and can affect the ability of fish to find food and to breathe.
- **Nutrients cause nuisance algae** and excess plants to grow. When the algae and plants die, they decay. This process of decay consumes oxygen, which can deprive other aquatic organisms of the oxygen they need to live.
- **Flooding can occur** as a result of paved-over surfaces that reduce infiltration and increase runoff.
What can You Do at Home?

Keep stormwater clean. Help stormwater soak into the ground.

- Minimize impervious areas on your property.
- Minimize the amount of phosphorus and pesticides used on lawns. Ensure healthy lawns by aerating and setting the mower at 3.5 inches or higher.
- Direct downspouts away from paved surfaces. Use rain gardens to help water soak in, or use rain barrels to collect rain water and use it to water lawns and gardens.
- Compost yard waste.
- Clean up pet waste.
- Don’t empty anything into storm drains.
- Maintain vehicles to prevent leaks, and recycle motor oil.
- Establish buffers of native vegetation in shoreland areas.
What can Your Community Do about Stormwater?

Many governments and businesses build stormwater structures and adopt stormwater-friendly practices to reduce runoff.

**Structures to Prevent Runoff Include:**
- Bioretention facilities and stormwater detention ponds.
- Structures that direct water from parking lots and streets to vegetated areas.
- Pervious pavement.
- Rain gardens and rain barrels.

**Better Management to Prevent Runoff Can Include:**
- Street sweeping.
- Leaf collection and composting (in some communities).
- Erosion control at construction sites.
- Recycling and clean sweep programs to collect household hazardous waste.
- Getting neighborhood and community groups aware and involved.

For more information about stormwater runoff, visit:

http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs

http://runoffinfo.uwex.edu

Federal and state laws now require many communities to manage stormwater to protect water quality.