WHAT IS STORM WATER RUNOFF?

Storm water runoff occurs when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over the ground. Impervious surfaces like driveways, sidewalks and streets prevent storm water from naturally soaking into the ground

Why is storm water runoff a problem? Storm water can pick up debris, chemicals, dirt and other pollutants and flow into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the waterbodies we use for swimming, fishing and providing water.

The effects of pollution... Polluted storm water runoff can have many adverse effects on plants, fish, animals and people.

- Sediment can cloud the water and make it difficult or impossible for aquatic plants to grow. Sediment also can destroy aquatic habitats.
- Excess nutrients can cause algae blooms. When algae die, they sink to the bottom and decompose in a process that removes oxygen from the water. Fish and other aquatic organisms cannot exist in water with low dissolved oxygen levels.
- Bacteria and other pathogens can wash into swimming areas and create health hazards, often making beach closures necessary.
- Debris-plastic bags, six-pack rings, bottles and cigarette butts-washed into water bodies can choke, suffocate or disable aquatic life like ducks, fish, turtles and birds.
- Household hazardous wastes like insecticides, pesticides, paint, solvents, used motor oil and other auto fluids can poison aquatic life. Land animals can become sick or die from eating diseased fish and shellfish or ingesting polluted water.
- Polluted storm water often affects drinking water sources. This, in turn, can affect human health and increase drinking water treatment costs.