

# Illicit Discharges, What Do They Mean To You?

First of all for those of you that do not know what an illicit discharge is, here is its definition. An illicit discharge defined by federal regulations is “Any discharge to a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) that is not composed entirely of storm water...” There can be three types. TRANSITORY ILLICIT DISCHARGE is a one-time event resulting from an accident, a spill, dumping or leakage. INTERMITTANT ILLICIT DISCHARGE occurs over a short period of time such as several hours per day, or a few days per year. CONTINUOUS ILLICIT DISCHARGE occurs as a result of an illegal connection from a residential, commercial or industrial facility that flows directly to storm water drain areas or structures.

Common pollutants found in illicit discharges are waters from a malfunctioning septic system, wash water from washing automobiles on cement driveways or pavement, automotive fluids, kitchen grease/oils, household cleansers, paints/solvents, fertilizers and pesticides. When picked up and carried by storm water flows these pollutants are discharged untreated directly into lakes, rivers and wetland areas that we use for recreational activities and for sources of drinking water.

Polluted storm water can have many adverse affects on plants, animals and people. Sediment (soils) can cloud the water and destroy aquatic habitats. Excess nutrients (fertilizer) can cause excess algae blooms which can lower oxygen levels in the water and make it uninhabitable for fish and other aquatic organisms. Bacteria and pathogens (animal and human wastes) can wash into swimming areas and create health hazards, sometimes causing beach closures. Debris (garbage) can choke, suffocate or disable aquatic life like ducks, fish, turtles and birds. Household and automotive wastes (chemicals) can poison aquatic life. Then land animals including people can become sick from eating diseased aquatic animals and or ingesting polluted water.

There are some simple things that we can change in our lives that can aid in the amount of pollutants that reach our surface waters such as: Paints, solvents, batteries and automotive fluids can be taken to recycling facilities, or can be taken to local hazardous waste drop off sites. Don't use a hose to clean up outside hazardous spills, try kitty litter or sawdust to soak up the material then sweep it up and dispose of it properly. Wash automobiles in the grass or on gravel areas so that the detergent and sediment will be filtered by the soil, or take your car to a commercial car wash where the wash waters are treated before being released back into the environment. Household cleaners and pesticides including their containers should be disposed of according to their label directions.

In many ways keeping pollutants out of our storm water takes no more that a little common sense and a few minutes of our time. If we remember that our contributions to pollution, which although may be very small in nature but when added to the acts of our neighbors can amount to substantial amounts that can be very detrimental to our environment. We can then appreciate that doing even the smallest things to reduce pollution can amount to very large rewards if we all work together.

This information has been provided through the Village of Lexington storm water program. For more information regarding matters like these please visit:

[www.villageoflexington.com](http://www.villageoflexington.com) or

[www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313\\_3682\\_3716---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3682_3716---,00.html)