



# THE MAIN DRAIN

STORMWATER NEWS YOU CAN USE

A Publication of the Portsmouth Department of Public Utilities/Public Works -  
Division of Stormwater Management  
Summer 2006

## Hurricanes and the Stormwater System

**H**urricane season blew in on June 1, 2006, marking the beginning of what many folks are saying is going to be an unusually active and strong season. And almost on cue, Tropical Storm "Alberto" swept thru the region only two weeks later and dumped 4.39 inches of rain on Portsmouth and the surrounding region. Although 4 inches of rain sounds like a lot, it pales in comparison to the levels that may be caused by a strong hurricane. The worrisome questions for residents and public works officials alike are "Where will all the water go during a hurricane?" and "How will our properties be affected?"

Fortunately, Portsmouth has 250 miles of underground storm drainage pipe and 42 miles of drainage ditches to collect runoff during rainstorms. But even with such an extensive runoff collection system, hurricanes generate so much water that low lying regions still tend to flood. So what can we do to help minimize the flooding? The answer is easy—keep the storm drainage system free of leaves, trash, debris, grass clippings and anything else that could limit its ability to receive runoff during a large storm.



*Excess debris from lawn care activities can block or clog drainage structures and impair the effectiveness of Portsmouth's stormwater system, causing increased flooding during hurricanes & other storms with heavy rainfall.*

To help prevent street flooding and to ensure the stormwater system works at its peak performance level, there are several easy things you can do:

- When you mow, edge, clip and weed-eat, direct the clippings toward the grass and not into the street.
- Blow grass clippings, dirt, leaves and other yard waste back into your lawn; it won't mind!
- If you notice a storm drain structure that is not working properly (around which flooding occurs regularly), contact the Public Works Maintenance Division at 393-8666.

Although flooding in some areas cannot be completely avoided, its impact may be lessened by a fully efficient stormwater system. Flood damage can lead to thousands of dollars in repairs; in some instances, this money can be saved by simply helping to prevent debris from entering the storm drainage system.

**STORMWATER  
TIP OF THE  
MONTH:**

**Only Rain Down the Drain!**  
Blow grass clippings back onto your lawn, not into storm drains.



## Working at the Car Wash. . . at Home

Every summer it happens. People gather up their supplies, put on their shorts, roll up their sleeves and wash their cars. This summer ritual is enjoyed by countless Americans, young and old. However, this ritual, done with carefree enjoyment, can actually be a serious threat to the local waterways in our communities. The runoff generated from car washing is polluted with detergents, oil, grease, grit and heavy metals from our cars. The contaminated car wash runoff flows down the driveway, enters the stormwater system, UNTREATED, and eventually makes its way into our local waterways. This makes the fish very unhappy!

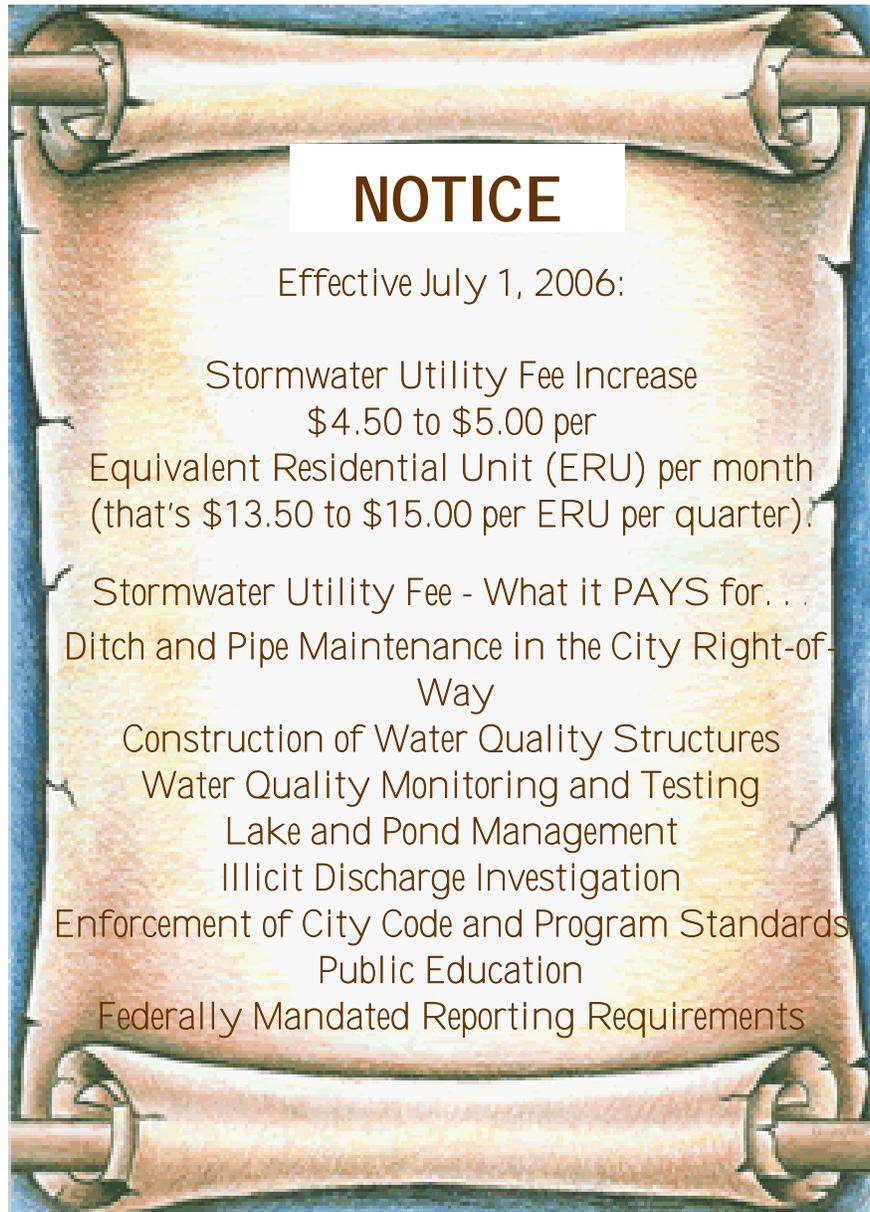
Although washing our cars at home is legal (and in many cases enjoyable), the potential damage caused to our waterways by the pollutants in the car wash runoff may affect the health of our environment, both now and in the future. So. . .what to do? Use a commercial car wash. These facilities have controls in place to ensure that polluted runoff does not enter our stormwater system. In fact, wash water from commercial facilities is usually recycled several times before it goes to a wastewater treatment plant.

If you do decide to wash your car at home, try these easy steps to be environmentally friendly and to help prevent stormwater pollution while you work:

- Wash your car on grass, gravel, or other permeable surfaces. Such surfaces help filter out the pollutants before they get to our waterways.
- Use a high pressure, low volume hose with a pistol grip or trigger nozzle to save water. Wash one section of the car at a time and rinse it quickly. Turn the hose off when not in use!
- Use detergent sparingly.
- Use biodegradable, non-phosphate detergent.
- When finished, dump the bucket of soapy water onto your lawn.



*By allowing car wash runoff to enter the storm drainage system, you allow potentially harmful pollutants such as oil, grease, grit and heavy metals to enter our streams and lakes. You might as well just wash your car there!*



***You Can Help!***

Although Portsmouth has a team of Stormwater Inspectors who travel throughout the City, they may not always know when someone pollutes the storm drainage system. Report Violators at (757) 393-8691. Sweeping, dumping or pouring anything into the street, storm drain or gutter pan is illegal!

## THE MAIN DRAIN

*The Main Drain* is a publication that addresses local Stormwater and Erosion and Sediment Control issues concerning Portsmouth residents and employees and is produced by The City of Portsmouth, Department of Public Utilities / Public Works - Division of Stormwater Management.

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## ATTENTION TEACHERS !!!

### Applications Being Accepted for Mini-Grants Program

The Hampton Roads Environmental Education Teams (HR WET, HR STORM and HR CLEAN) offer competitive mini-grants of up to \$250 each year to provide supplemental funding for environmentally-related projects. All school teachers (K-12) and youth leaders in the Hampton Roads region are eligible.

All projects should be specifically tied to litter prevention, waste minimization and recycling or beautification; or water conservation, stormwater pollution prevention and efficiency.

For a list of appropriate topic areas, more information and access to the easy-to-fill-out application, refer to the HR STORM website at: <http://www.hrstorm.org/MiniGrant.shtml>

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