

Stormwater Management - Frequently Asked Questions

Background information

In 2006, the City of Anderson began a process to implement a stormwater management program as required by the Federal government. This process requires the City to submit an application for a *National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System* (NPDES) permit. The permit requires the City to address the quality of stormwater runoff through six minimum measures.

One of the requirements of the permit includes a reliable and sufficient source of funding for the program. Beginning in June, citizens will receive information about the establishment of the City's Stormwater Utility to fund the federally mandated program.

What is stormwater?

Stormwater runoff occurs when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over the ground. Impervious surfaces like driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, and streets prevent stormwater runoff from naturally soaking into the ground.

What is considered to be an impervious surface?

An impervious surface is any surface that prevents water from penetrating the ground. Examples include buildings, driveways, parking lots, swimming pools, patios, paved areas, tanks, pads, and other features that are impervious to rainfall.

Why is stormwater a problem?

Natural areas allow rain and snowmelt to easily filter into the ground. Impervious surfaces significantly increase the volume and velocity of runoff and the amount of pollutants in stormwater. As natural areas are replaced by impervious surfaces like roads, parking lots, and buildings, stormwater 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. Generally, anything that enters a storm sewer system is discharged untreated into the water bodies we use for swimming, fishing and providing drinking water.

Polluted stormwater runoff can have many adverse effects on plants, fish, animals and people.

Why is the City of Anderson establishing stormwater regulations?

The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) are requiring it of all cities with an urbanized area of less than 100,000 people and a population density of greater than 1,000 residents per square mile. And because the ultimate goal of the Clean Water Act is to improve our waterways and hence our water supply.

The SCDHEC issued the NPDES general permit for stormwater discharges for cities of our size in March 2003. Many Phase II communities in South Carolina (like Anderson) disagreed with much of the permit language and decided to appeal the permit with help from the SC Municipal Association. The City of Anderson joined in the appeals process and postponed taking final steps toward implementing its Stormwater Management Plan. After a few years of debate, a resolution was finally reached in March of 2005. As the new permit became effective on March 1, 2006, City Council continued with Woolpert, Inc. (consulting engineers) to help ensure that the City is in compliance with the general permit requirements.

What is a stormwater utility fee?

A stormwater utility fee is the result of unfunded USEPA and SCDHEC mandates on stormwater discharge. This fee is used to finance annual compliance with the NPDES permitting standards. This fee is similar to a water or sewer fee. In essence, customers pay a fee to convey storm water from their properties.

What is NPDES?

NPDES stands for National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, which is the compliance system for the Clean Water Act. NPDES requires that all storm water discharges that enter waters of the United States must meet minimum federal water quality requirements.

Is the storm water utility fee considered a tax?

No, the storm water utility fee is not a tax. It is a fee generated to maintain the storm water utility system and fund the NPDES permit compliance. It is user based and dependent on the contribution to the storm sewer system.

Is the stormwater utility fee legal?

Yes, stormwater utility fees are legal. State and federal courts have ruled that stormwater utility fees are necessary to maintain the public stormwater system and such fees represent an equitable way for the community to share the cost of a public service. They are becoming more and more common throughout the United States.

The Anderson City Council has reviewed and discussed the unfunded stormwater mandates and how to implement the requirements at public works sessions and public City Council meetings.

What is the ultimate goal of NPDES permitting?

The goal of NPDES permitting is to improve and protect the quality of our nation's waterways by eliminating pollution from stormwater runoff to the maximum extent practicable.

When will the fee be implemented?

The fee will be adopted as part of the 2007-08 budget process with the first billing on October 1, 2007.

How is the stormwater utility fee calculated?

The fee is determined based upon the amount of impervious surface on the average single-family house or ERU (Equivalent Residential Unit). One ERU is based on the average residential lot size of 0.40 acres and a runoff coefficient (C) of 0.40.

Who else is paying a stormwater utility fee?

Every parcel owner in the City of Anderson is responsible for paying a stormwater utility fee including City of Anderson, County, State and Federal government parcels and public institutions, commercial and industrial parcel owners. There are no exceptions from paying a stormwater utility fee.

Will the stormwater utility fee be influenced by the amount of rain?

No. The stormwater utility fee is in no way related to the amount of rainfall. The fee will fund ongoing maintenance and capital improvements on the city-maintained storm drainage infrastructure, as well as other water quality and water quantity programs.

What does the stormwater program do?

The stormwater program is charged with the maintenance and improvement of the drainage systems. These systems consist of storm drains, catch basins, underground pipes, open channels, culverts, and creeks.

Why is there a stormwater fee instead of a tax?

A property's value does not affect runoff, so property taxes are not the most equitable way to pay for stormwater services. While a high-rise building and a shopping mall may have similar property values and similar taxes, the shopping mall probably produces more runoff due to more rooftops and more parking. So, the fee system equitably will ensure that the customer pays only for the runoff that they produce.

Questions?

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