

Frequently Asked Questions about Stormwater

1. What is "stormwater" and where does it flow?

Stormwater is the runoff from rain and snow melt. It flows to a creek or stream by a system of pipes and channels.

The inlet grates in the City's streets are openings to the pipe network. Ultimately, stormwater enters natural systems such as streams and rivers. Some stormwater is absorbed and over a long period of time, enters groundwater. Some stormwater is absorbed by plants, grass and trees, used by them to grow.



2. Why do we need to manage stormwater in Allentown?

Public management of stormwater runoff is required because the amount that runs off properties can cause flooding and erode public and private property. It can pollute our creeks and streams because it carries dirt, grit, fertilizers, oils, and grease with it as it enters our natural systems.

Programs are mandated by the Clean Water Act, as amended in 1987. These programs are developed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. They are set forth in a permit issued to the City that allows the stormwater runoff from the public drainage system to discharge to creeks, streams and rivers.

3. What is this charge for stormwater I see on my bill?

A stormwater fee is a charge for service. It provides primary revenue for the operation and maintenance of the City's drainage system, including compliance with Federal and State mandates for the protection of water quality.

The stormwater fee revenue is dedicated to stormwater only. It provides for stormwater management services in the Public Works Department. Historically, local governments use of service fees for primary program funding began in the early 1970s and thousands of communities across the US and Canada have adopted similar funding mechanisms.

Allentown's stormwater fee is dedicated to:

- provide revenue for the operation and maintenance of the drainage system,
- fix storm sewer infrastructure, and
- provide capital projects for water quality treatment activities mandated by the state and EPA.

4. Doesn't the City already tax my property and/or my income for stormwater programs? Why is the current level of funding not adequate?

In the past, the City has used general revenues to pay for stormwater services. That funding is not sufficient to address two primary issues that are increasing costs and must be addressed by the City. The City Council adopted the fee approach to ensure dedication of funds for stormwater and to avoid a tax increase.

One issue is a federal/Commonwealth mandate to clean up the streams and Lehigh River. The City must comply with these environmental laws and regulations. They have changed over time, requiring more to be done by the City to protect the environment. These include:

- Inspection of all stormwater systems, both public and private.
- Development and implementation of pollution reduction plans for streams considered impaired. Studies must be conducted to identify the sources of and ways to reduce sediment and other

pollution from entering the waterways. Such plans include capital investments in on-site treatment.

- Increased public education.
- Monitoring of industrial site discharges to the public drainage system and enforcement of corrective actions if significant pollutants are found.

The second issue is the aging pipe and drainage system. Deferring maintenance and rehabilitation of the system increases costs and results in more flooding and system failures. The City is taking steps to increase resources for improving the system to minimize failures. Some pipe segments are over 100 years old and at the end of their useful life. A backlog of needed repairs exists.

5. How was the fee calculated?

The impervious surface on a property serves as the “meter” for distributing costs for stormwater management services. Impervious area (development on properties) creates the need for a publicly operated drainage network. It is common to all properties regardless if the use is for business, religious, school, government, industry or residence.

The service fee structure is not an attempt to measure how much stormwater runoff occurs from each and every parcel in the City, which would be extremely costly, and technically challenging to do.

6. What is impervious area and why is it important?

Impervious area refers to hardened surfaces on developed property that change the way that rain and snow melt can be managed. It interrupts the infiltration of rain water into soils/subsoils. The surfaces include buildings, sidewalks, driveways, garages, patios, tennis courts, basketball courts, and other such features. Gravel and stone are considered “hardened” surfaces when they are placed over submaterial that cannot adsorb the runoff (compacted clay soil, landscape barriers, etc.).

Impervious area changes the volume (quantity) and velocity (speed) of the stormwater runoff. This creates the need for a public drainage system that can carry the runoff safely away from the properties.

7. How much is the stormwater fee? Who decides how much the rate will be?

The annual stormwater fee is \$20 per 500 square feet of impervious area. Rates are set by the City Council during the annual budget process. Two example fee calculations are presented below.

<u>Residential Property</u>		<u>Non-Residential Property</u>	
<u>Features:</u>	<u>Sq. Ft:</u>	<u>Features:</u>	<u>Sq. Ft:</u>
Building Footprint	1,200	Building Footprint	4,150
Parking Area	500	Parking Area	8,000
Sidewalk and Other Paved Area	750	Sidewalk and Other Paved Area	1,700
Swimming Pool	160	Materials Yard	14,000
<u>Total Impervious Surface:</u>	2,610 sq. ft.	<u>Total Impervious Surface:</u>	27,850 sq. ft.
<u>Billing Units:</u>		<u>Billing Units:</u>	
Impervious Surface/500 sq. ft. = 5.2 = 5 BU (Rounded to nearest integer)		Impervious Surface/500 sq. ft. = 55.7 = 56 BU (Rounded to nearest integer)	
<u>Annual Stormwater Fee:</u>		<u>Annual Stormwater Fee:</u>	
\$20 X 5 billing units = \$100		\$20 x 56 billing units = \$1,120	

8. Who is being charged this fee?

All properties in the City with over 250 square feet of impervious surface are required to pay the fee. Two exceptions are the impervious area in public roadways (City and PennDOT) and railway ballast (tracks).

This approach has several advantages. First, it fairly distributes the cost of the City's stormwater services to all properties with 250 square feet of impervious area or greater. This concept is similar to measuring usage and calculating fees for drinking water and sanitary sewer services. Second, the amount of the fee must be linked to the services required and revenue is deposited into a special fund that can only be used for stormwater management. Finally, the approach allows the City to provide "credits" to property owners who have implemented practices that contribute to required mandates in managing stormwater (reduce pollution and reduce quantity of runoff).

9. How is the stormwater fee different from my water/sewer bill?

The stormwater system is a separate system from the drinking water distribution and wastewater collection systems. Drinking water is treated and provided through distribution pipes to faucets and other access points (e.g., toilets, dishwasher, and washing machine). Wastewater is water that discharges from your home or business after being used for washing, cooking, etc. It is collected by a series of pipes that lead to the sewage treatment plant where it is treated before entering a stream or river.

Stormwater is generated by rain and snow events. It travels through separate pipes, ditches, or over roads to a local creek or stream without treatment. The infrastructure is there to help prevent local flooding, stream erosion, and water pollution.

Operation and maintenance, upgrade and replacement of the drinking water/wastewater system are managed by Lehigh County Authority. Fees are charged based on a meter that measures the amount of drinking water used by the property and an estimate of wastewater flows from the property. These fees are not based on the actual cost of service to get water to and/or from any specific property.

Stormwater services are not paid for by drinking water/wastewater revenue. City stormwater services are provided by the Public Works Department. The "meter" for stormwater is impervious area on each parcel.

10. We are a tax-exempt property; why are we being charged this fee?

The stormwater fee is not a tax; it is a service fee. All developed properties in the City are charged the fee on the same basis; the presence of impervious area, measured in 500 square feet units.

11. Can the fee be waived?

No. Every effort has been made to make this fee as equitable and fair as possible so that all properties that contribute to the need for a publicly owned and operated stormwater system share the costs.

12. What activities will be funded by the fee? Who makes these decisions?

The initial stormwater fee is based upon a 10-year plan developed by the Public Works Department and reviewed with the City Council during the budget process. It includes projects and services such as:

- Water Quality Permit (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4)) compliance as mandated by the State and Federal Government
- Capital projects
- Hydrologic and hydraulic studies
- BMP inspection and tracking
- Operation and Maintenance activities
- Systems mapping and conditions assessments

- System replacement (pipes and inlets)
- Equipment (Street Sweeper, Vacuum Truck, etc.)
- Emergency pipe, inlet and culvert replacement

Existing stormwater related services traditionally performed by the City such as street sweeping, leaf collection, and land development plan review will continue to be funded by the General Fund and Solid Waste Fees, and not the Stormwater Fund directly.

13. When was the stormwater fee discussed publicly?

- September 11 – update at Environmental Advisory Council
- September 13 – presentation at City Council
- November 8 – open house presentations for specific property owners (top 100)
- November 8 – presentation at Public Works Budget Session of City Council
- December 4 – two public meetings at various locations in the City
- December 4 – presentation of budget to City Council
- December 5 – three public meetings at various locations in the City
- December 6 – presentation of ordinance and budget to City Council for adoption

14. I think the number of billing units shown on my bill is wrong. What can I do?

The City has established a formal appeals process, administered by the Public Works Department. You may obtain a copy of the appeal application and instructions at www.allentownpa.gov/public-works/stormwater. Or, you may contact the Public Works Department at 610 437-7584 to request a copy. Appeal applications must be received by the City within 30 days of the date the bill was mailed to you.

15. Where can I get more information about the Stormwater Fee and Stormwater Management Program?

You can find more information about the Stormwater Fee and the Stormwater Management Program on the City's website: www.allentownpa.gov/public-works/stormwater.

16. How can I report a stormwater issue (flooding, dumping, water quality, spill, etc.) in my neighborhood?

To report a stormwater issue or to get more information on stormwater facilities in your neighborhood, please contact the City Public Works Department at (610) 437-7584.