

When Managing Stormwater, Cranberry Goes With The Flow



Clean water flows downhill in American politics – but slowly. The 1972 federal Clean Water Act eventually trickled down to the states, then to counties, and finally to local municipalities, where responsibility for implementing its provisions and protecting the nation's waterways now resides.

A complex act to begin with, its massive body of regulations acquired even more detail as it cascaded from one level of government down to the next. Those provisions continue to grow. For example, municipalities defined as urbanized areas, including Cranberry Township, are required to secure stormwater permits from their states. A permit is valid for five years. Cranberry's expires in 2018, and Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection has made clear that the requirements for its renewal will expand significantly.

Problem is, the timeline for securing permits includes a series of built-in milestones. To meet them, the action plans required by the permit application will have to be formulated very soon. But DEP has yet to provide the necessary guidance. It's a Catch 22.

Looming deadline

"By March of 2018 we'll have to get our new permit," Township Waterworks

Coordinator Tim Schutzman pointed out. "Six months earlier, we'll need to submit our Notice of Intent, but you need to have your Pollution Reduction Plan in place before submitting the Notice of Intent. Your plan has to go through a public comment period so that everybody has a chance to review the final version and offer their comments before it can be approved by the Township.

"At this point, we're trying to find out from DEP what, exactly, are we going to be required to do? What's going to be involved? What are the guidelines? What are the criteria? And what can we

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do to meet those criteria? Right now, the ball is in DEP's court."

Among the anticipated changes will be a huge increase in the number of outfalls – points from which rain flows into various stormwater handling facilities – all of which require inspection by Township staff. From the 150 outfalls currently inspected each year for illicit discharges, the new rules are expected to involve 700 or more – a huge expansion of Township staff time required to comply.

Do it yourself

Still, the intent of the law – to safeguard streams from pollution, minimize flooding, and recharge underground aquifers – is important, and Cranberry has made significant strides in satisfying

its provisions. That's not the case everywhere. Many older communities whose land development pre-dates current stormwater regulations, have sanitary and stormwater lines which are combined into a single system. Today, they're struggling with stormwater issues. A number of them, including Mt. Lebanon, Meadville, Dormont and Whitehall, as well as the entire state of Maryland, have created stormwater management districts to help retrofit their water handling systems and reduce the impacts of storm water runoff from sources such as construction sites, industrial operations, government properties, and institutional facilities.

Here in Cranberry, the sweat equity of residents is helping to move the community in the right direction. They include Seneca Valley girls in an after-school STEM club stenciling dumping alerts on catch basins, a growing number of households installing rain barrels, people landscaping lawns to incorporate rain gardens – recessed areas that allow water to be re-absorbed into the ground. They include the steadily expanding use of pavers in place of cement or asphalt – an approach that allows water to seep down between the blocks. They include the installation of small earthen berms where a lawn meets the road so that water is retained long enough to soak in. And they include marking property lines with vegetative swale instead of hedges or fences.

"DEP's website has other examples," Schutzman said. "If someone is going to do a project anyway, maybe they should consider doing it so that it holds water, too. It doesn't have to be big projects. Little improvements can go a long way. If everyone does a little bit, those little things will have a big impact downstream." ~