



# City of Cleveland Stormwater Utility Frequently Asked Questions



**Q. What is stormwater runoff?**

**A.** Stormwater runoff is the water that flows off roofs, driveways, parking lots, streets and other hard surfaces during rain storms. Stormwater runoff is also the rain that flows off grass surfaces and wooded areas that is not absorbed into the soil. The runoff that is not absorbed into the ground pours into ditches, culverts, catch basins and storm sewers. It does not receive any treatment before entering the streams and lakes.

**Q. What is stormwater pollution?**

**A.** Water from rain or melting snow either seeps into the ground or “runs off” to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes, and other water bodies. On its way, runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water. Examples of common pollutants include fertilizers, pesticides, pet wastes, sediments, oils, salts, trace metals, grass clippings, leaves and litter. Stormwater polluted runoff can be generated anywhere people use or alter the land, such as farms, yards, roofs, driveways, construction sites, and roadways.

**Q. Why is stormwater runoff a problem?**

**A.** As precipitation falls on undeveloped areas, it is primarily absorbed into the ground or slowly runs off into streams, rivers or other water bodies. However, development resulting in rooftops and paved areas prevent water from being absorbed and create a faster rate of runoff. This development often causes localized flooding or water quality issues.

**Q. Why do we need to manage our stormwater runoff?**

**A.** Stormwater runoff needs to be managed just as any other natural resource. First, it is needed to minimize damages that may occur when stormwater runoff exceeds the capacity of the pipes and open channels used to carry stormwater to our rivers and streams. Second, it is also needed to maintain the quality of our natural watercourses as drinking water supplies and for recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, water skiing, etc.

**Q. What Is the City currently doing about these problems?**

**A.** Historically, the City has performed maintenance of the stormwater collection system, which includes cleaning, repair and replacement of the City’s stormwater infrastructure. When funding has been available in the past, the City has implemented a small number of flooding improvement projects. A new partnership agreement with the Army Corps of Engineers is intended to address flooding in a more comprehensive manner. The City also regulates the effects of stormwater runoff from new development. Most recently, the Federal Government has mandated that all cities the size of Cleveland implement a series of programs and services to improve water quality.

**Q. Who owns the stormwater system?**

**A.** Individual property owners. Currently, in most cases, the owner of record is the responsible party to accept, to maintain, to add and to discharge stormwater flows. These systems routinely cross City-maintained property that is generally located within public street rights-of-way.



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**Q. What is the City's responsibility for stormwater?**

A. The City is responsible for managing all aspects of stormwater within its jurisdiction. The City operates and maintains drainage facilities that are located within the public right-of-way or public easements. The City is also responsible for the water quality of natural streams within its jurisdiction as designated by both the State and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The City does not maintain facilities that are located on private property or that fall under the jurisdiction of other local governments.

**Q. How does the City currently pay for its stormwater services?**

A. Stormwater services are primarily funded from revenue derived from property taxes collected by the City, which are held in the City's General Fund. As such, stormwater must compete for these funds with other City services such as parks, roads, fire, police, etc. In addition, a small fee was established in 2014 to generate funding for a study to address long-term funding needs.

Due to the high demand on the General Fund over the past several years, the City has not been able to set aside enough funds to adequately address all the City's stormwater needs. Although the city has done a good job managing the existing program on a limited budget, the backlog of stormwater projects to address significant flooding issues in the City has grown and the new, federally mandated water quality programs that must be implemented have strained existing resources.

**Q. Why has City of Cleveland chosen to implement a separate fee for stormwater management?**

A. By establishing a dedicated funding source through stormwater fees, the City can ensure that the revenue required to manage and maintain this important system is available. A stormwater utility program will enable the City to take a more aggressive approach to stormwater management. The additional funds raised through the stormwater fee will allow the City to address the flooding relief projects that will be proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers flood study. The City will also be able to provide an increased level of system maintenance and repair that is necessary to support the aging infrastructure in Cleveland. In addition, the utility fees will enable the City to construct necessary capital improvement projects to reduce the risk to public health and safety from flooding. Finally, the fees will support the development of a comprehensive stormwater management and water quality improvement plan, as mandated by the Federal and State governments.

**Q. How did the City of Cleveland develop its stormwater utility program?**

A. The City hired an independent consulting firm to perform a review of the City's current stormwater program and to identify long-term funding needs to address city-wide flooding concerns and regulatory requirements. The results of the study were presented to the City's Stormwater Regulations Board and the City Council for consideration. On May 26, 2015, the City held a public hearing to receive comments on the recommended program and held the first vote. On June 22, 2015 the City Council held the final vote, and approved the ordinance establishing the new stormwater utility program.

**Q. What is the basis for the fee that is charged?**

A. The stormwater utility fee is based on the square footage of impervious surface area on your lot. The vast majority of utilities across the country have found this to be the most equitable way to charge and collect revenues for this program. A stormwater utility fee is similar to a water or sewer fee. In

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essence, customers pay a fee related to the amount of runoff generated from their site, which is directly related to the amount of impervious surface on the site.

**Q. What is impervious surface area?**

**A.** Impervious surface area is any surface that does not readily absorb water and impedes the natural infiltration of water into the soil. In terms of the ordinance, it means the number of square feet of horizontal surface covered by buildings, and other impervious surfaces. Common examples include roofs, driveways, parking areas, sidewalks, patios, decks, tennis courts, concrete or asphalt streets, crushed stone and compacted gravel surfaces.

**Q. Why do I have to pay a stormwater fee?**

**A.** The City is responsible for providing building and maintaining infrastructure for drainage and flood control as well as compliance with new Federal and State regulations on water quality. This includes installation and maintenance of storm drains, inlets, and ditches as well as ensuring State programs such as erosion and sediment control are provided on construction sites. All of these services are done to protect personal and public property as well as provide for a healthy environment. Funding is not provided by Federal or State government for these services.

**Q. When will the stormwater fee take effect?**

**A.** The existing stormwater charge on the current Cleveland Utility bill will be replaced by the new stormwater utility fee starting in January 2016.

**Q. Why is there a stormwater fee instead of a tax?**

**A.** A property's value does not affect runoff, so property taxes are not the most equitable way to pay for stormwater services. For example, a high-rise building and a shopping mall may have similar value and pay similar property taxes. However, the shopping mall produces more runoff because of the amount of parking and rooftops. The fee system ensures the shopping center pays a higher stormwater fee than the high rise.

**Q. Are tax-exempt properties also exempt from the stormwater fee?**

**A.** No, because it is a fee – not a tax. Taxes are based on the value of the property. The stormwater fee is assessed based on the amount of impervious surface on the property (i.e. hard surfaces such as roofs, driveways and parking lots), which is directly related to the amount of runoff the property produces. The runoff generated by these impervious surfaces contributes to pollution and flooding problems and, therefore, all property owners should pay their share of the costs.

**Q. What is a Single Family Unit (SFU)?**

**A.** A SFU is the average square footage of the impervious surface area (measured in square feet) for a single family residential property determined pursuant to the City's new ordinance. That amount is 3,830 square feet. The SFU was determined by performing detailed measurements of impervious surfaces contained on a sample of single family residential properties selected at random across all areas of the City. The resulting data was analyzed and the average impervious surface value for the data set determined the SFU value.

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**Q. How will single-family residential properties be billed?**

A. Most single-family homes will be charged a rate of \$3.25 each month. However, for equity purposes, the City Council has approved a tiered rate system, whereby very small homes will pay a slightly lower rate (\$1.65 each month) and very large homes will pay a higher rates (\$4.90 each month). The City’s fee will appear on the Cleveland Utilities bill that you receive each month according to the table below.

Description	Monthly Fee
Rate - Single Family Residential Property	<b>Charge per Dwelling Unit</b>
<u>Tier (square feet of impervious area)</u>	
0 to 1,775	50% of base rate or \$1.65 per month
1,776 to 5,900	100% of base rate or \$3.25 per month
5,901 and beyond	150% of base rate or \$4.90 per month

*Please note that the placement within the tier is NOT based on the square footage of your living space, but rather the square footage of the impervious area on your property (rooftop, driveway, patio, etc.).*

**Q. How will non-single residential properties (such as duplexes, apartments, condos, etc.) be billed?**

A. If you are located in a non-single family property, the monthly fee will follow the table below. If you are the owner of a complex that receives the utility bill for multiple units, you will receive a charge for each dwelling unit in your complex. The City’s fee will appear on the Cleveland Utilities bill that you receive each month.

Description	Monthly Fee
Rate – Non-Single Family Residential Property	<b>Charge per Dwelling Unit</b>
<u>Subcategory</u>	
Duplex/Triplex/Quadplex	50% of base rate or \$1.65 per month
Apartments (5+ units)	40% of base rate or \$1.30 per month
Town Homes	40% of base rate or \$1.30 per month
Mobile Homes	70% of base rate or \$2.30 per month

**Q. How are non-residential property fees determined and billed?**

A. All non-residential properties will be billed at a rate based on their impervious area as well. To determine the monthly fee, divide the total impervious area of your property by 3,830 square feet (or one Single Family Unit) to obtain the number of SFUs and multiply by the base single family rate (\$3.25 per month per SFU). Impervious areas were determined by analyzing aerial photographs to identify the amount of impervious surface on each property. For the majority of properties, the City’s fee will be billed on the Cleveland Utilities bill. However, in some circumstances, alternative billing methods may be used.

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**Q. Is there anything I can do to reduce my fee?**

A. Yes, the City is in the process of developing a fee reduction/credit manual that will provide opportunities for customers to reduce their monthly fee. Credits/reductions will be awarded to customers that install best management practices on site that reduce the runoff burden to the City's stormwater system. More information will be available in the City's Stormwater Utility Fee Credit Manual.

**Q. What will the money collected by the Stormwater Utility be used to pay for?**

A. The revenues generated by this fee will be used to fund all stormwater-related services, which include enforcement of the City's stormwater ordinances, planning for future impacts, stormwater infrastructure maintenance and repairs, construction of necessary capital improvement projects and associated property acquisitions. The fee will also pay for annual compliance requirements of the City's NPDES MS4 permit, which is a program mandated by the State and Federal government for all communities similar in size to Cleveland.

**Q. Do other cities have a stormwater fee?**

A. Nearly 20 cities/counties in Tennessee (and over 1,400 nationwide) have a stormwater fee. In Tennessee, cities/counties such as Signal Mountain, Hamilton County, Chattanooga, Murfreesboro, Kingsport, Franklin, Memphis, Smyrna, and Nashville use a stormwater utility fee.

**Q. What are the goals of the City of Cleveland's stormwater program?**

A. The stormwater program focuses on reducing the potential for the loss of life or property due to flooding and improving and protecting the quality of our lakes, rivers and streams.

**Q. What are some examples of drainage problems?**

A. Drainage problems may include roadway or structural flooding, clogged or failing underground pipes and culverts, stream bank erosion and stormwater pollution affecting a stream.

**Q. Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?**

A. Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. When stormwater runs off your property, the City must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. Direct benefits may include providing safe passage on roadways during storms, protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property downstream from your runoff, complying with Federal and State mandates, educating our children about pollution, and improving water quality.

**Q. I have a drainage problem in my yard. Who do I call to get help with this problem?**

A. You can call the City of Cleveland – Development and Engineering Services at (423) 479-1913. We will investigate your concern and advise you of what action can be taken.

**Q. Where can I get more information regarding the stormwater utility fee?**

A. Any questions regarding the Cleveland Stormwater Utility should be directed to the City's Development and Engineering Services at (423) 479-1913. The primary contact is Chris Broom ([cbroom@clevelandtn.gov](mailto:cbroom@clevelandtn.gov)).

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