

A Major Opportunity: Preventing Runoff Pollution and Flooding

Runoff from streets and parking lots after it rains is a leading cause of pollution to our streams, rivers, and lakes nationwide and a significant cause of flooding and sewer overflows. Traditional approaches to treating and managing this stormwater runoff have failed. Fortunately, communities across the country have proved that there are better, more cost-effective solutions for ensuring clean water. Green infrastructure has emerged as the most reliable and cost-effective path toward achieving clean water while providing multiple community benefits.

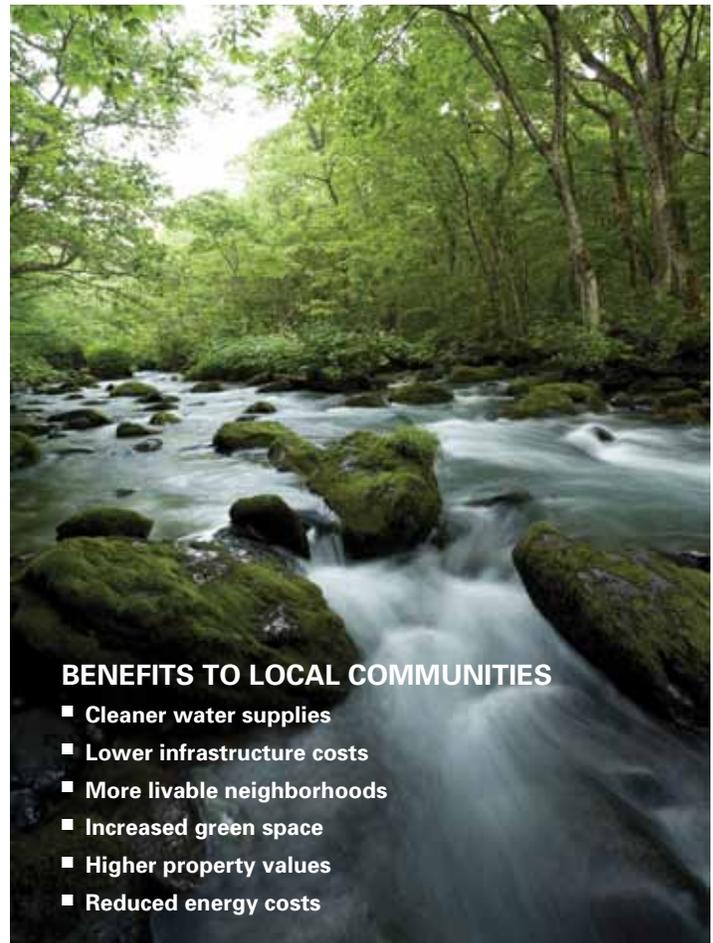
Green infrastructure refers to features like green roofs, rain gardens, and permeable pavement that capture and reuse rainwater. By allowing water to naturally filter into the ground, we can prevent it from rushing over dirty streets and parking lots and carrying pollution to local waterways or overwhelming public sewer systems.

Based on lessons learned from local innovation and advances in science and technology, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is modernizing its national stormwater regulations and is scheduled to propose revisions in June 2013.

COST-EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO PROTECTING CLEAN WATER

The EPA is considering the following improvements for developed and developing areas:

- Establishing objective performance standards for development projects that will encourage the use of approaches like green roofs and rain gardens. Objective standards improve consistency while maintaining local flexibility.
- Increasing fairness for many communities by controlling runoff from currently unregulated sources that are increasing downstream pollution, flooding, and treatment costs.
- Revitalizing communities by requiring plans to reduce polluted runoff from already-built areas.



BENEFITS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Cleaner water supplies
- Lower infrastructure costs
- More livable neighborhoods
- Increased green space
- Higher property values
- Reduced energy costs

COMMUNITY EXAMPLES OF SMARTER STORMWATER SOLUTIONS

Green infrastructure has been adopted in communities across the country. In these cities and towns, this approach to controlling runoff protects our waterways and delivers wide-ranging benefits, including higher property values, increased tax revenues, fewer beach closures, reduced air pollution, and lower urban air temperatures. As a result, green infrastructure can improve people's health and well-being. Communities that are leading the way on green infrastructure include:

- **Lenexa, Kansas**, uses green infrastructure approaches, including rain gardens, to reduce flooding and improve water quality.
- **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**, has incorporated green infrastructure practices into its planning and development to reduce the city's combined sewer overflow problem and transform one-third of its impervious surfaces to "greened acres."
- **Milwaukee, Wisconsin**, has invested in a range of smarter stormwater practices, including downspout disconnection, green roofs, and permeable pavement, to alleviate its combined sewer overflow problem.
- **Seattle, Washington**, uses regulatory programs (such as landscaping requirements) and voluntary approaches (including incentives for green infrastructure on private property) as part of a comprehensive approach to its green infrastructure investment.



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A ROAD MAP FOR CLEAN WATER AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

To encourage the development of a smart, modern set of clean water safeguards, the Clean Water for Healthy Communities Coalition recommends that EPA incorporate the following principles into its proposal:

- Promote the use of green infrastructure approaches by requiring new development and redevelopment projects to be designed to retain the vast majority of precipitation on site. These practices reduce polluted stormwater runoff, downstream flood risks, and treatment costs for public sewer and wastewater utilities (and their ratepayers).
- Require significant existing stormwater pollution sources to reduce their impact by decreasing runoff. Meaningful reductions can be achieved through phased planning and implementation.
- Require all stormwater pollution sources to do their fair share to protect clean water supplies. Areas of new or expected development, lands providing critical wildlife habitat, and areas that cause or contribute to water quality problems should be covered.

SUPPORT STRONG SAFEGUARDS FOR CLEAN WATER

This initiative represents a unique opportunity to better and more equitably manage polluted runoff and protect our communities' clean water supplies. EPA should promote a smart and modern set of safeguards that encourage the use of cost-effective green infrastructure practices, require significant existing sources of stormwater pollution to decrease runoff from impervious areas, and target key areas that contribute to water quality problems. In addition to improving water quality and reducing flooding, these practices will provide wide-ranging benefits to communities nationwide.

The Clean Water for Healthy Communities coalition is an informal affiliation of advocacy, community, and professional organizations that support effective safeguards to prevent stormwater pollution and build healthier, more vibrant communities. The Coalition is committed to achieving a strong rule that promotes these goals.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

U.S. EPA: cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/rulemaking.cfm

National Research Council: www.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/nrc_stormwaterreport.pdf