



Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership

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Stormwater Fees Are to Improve Water Quality

Once again, when property tax bills are distributed in 2009, most bills will include a “Stormwater User Fee.” This fee is to help local governments pay for programs to improve the quality of water in our streams, rivers, and lakes. More information is available at www.stormwaterelkco.org.

Federal Clean Water Act mandates and State statutes require local governments to put new programs and regulations in place to improve the quality of stormwater runoff. The City of Elkhart, City of Goshen, Town of Bristol, and Elkhart County are working cooperatively to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on our local rivers and streams and comply with federal and state laws.

To gain efficiency and hold down costs, these government entities have formed the Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership. The programs the Partnership is required to put in place include public education and participation, regulation of construction site runoff, post-construction stormwater management on new development, illicit discharge detection and elimination, and pollution prevention in municipal operations.

In order to fund these efforts, a stormwater management fee is charged to all real estate in Elkhart, Goshen, Bristol, and unincorporated portions of Elkhart County. For single-family residential parcels, the annual stormwater fee is \$15. For parcels with more than one dwelling such as apartments, the fee is \$15 for each of the first two dwelling units, and \$11.25 for each extra unit. Non-residential parcels are charged \$15 for every 2,800 square feet of impervious surface. Impervious surface refers to hard surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, and parking lots that cause water to run off, rather than filter into the ground. The county data processing department has calculated the amount of impervious surface for each non-residential parcel based on data provided by the County and Township Assessors.

This stormwater fee applies to all owners of property with impervious surface, including tax-exempt property owners, located in Elkhart, Goshen, Bristol, and unincorporated parts of Elkhart County.

For more information, please contact Eric Kurtz, Stormwater Coordinator, at eric.kurtz@in.nacdnet.net or 574-533-3630 ext. 3.

The attached pages have answers to frequently asked questions.

Here are some common questions or comments about the stormwater fee and their answers:

- Why am I charged this fee?
 - The fee pays for local programs to improve water quality in our streams, rivers, and lakes. Local government entities have to implement these programs due to mandates from the federal Clean Water Act and state rules.
- Who has to pay this fee?
 - Every parcel with hard surface in Elkhart, Goshen, Bristol, or unincorporated parts of Elkhart County is assessed a fee. Millersburg, Middlebury, Nappanee, and Wakarusa are exempt from this federal mandate because of their size and distance from other urban areas.
- Does everybody in these areas have to pay?
 - The charge is assessed to all property that has houses, buildings, or other hard surface. It is assessed the same way for every property owner, whether they live within the city limits of Elkhart or Goshen, in Bristol, or in unincorporated parts of Elkhart County. Tax-exempt properties are assessed the fee.
- How is the rate determined?
 - The fee is \$15 for single-family residential parcels. For multi-unit residential parcels such as apartments, the fee is based on the number of dwelling units. It is \$15 each for the first two dwellings, then \$11.25 for each unit beyond that. For non-residential parcels, the county data processing department has calculated the area of impervious or hard surface (rooftops, parking lots, driveways, etc.). The fee for these parcels is \$15 per 2800 square feet of impervious surface. The information is based on data collected by the township and county assessors.
- What about farmers?
 - For parcels that contain a dwelling, farmers are charged the residential rate of \$15. For parcels that have no dwelling, the non-residential rate of \$15 per 2800 square feet of hard surface applies.
- What about business owners?
 - If a parcel has no dwelling, it will be charged at the non-residential rate as explained above.
- What about tax-exempt properties?
 - This is a fee, not a tax. Tax-exempt properties will receive a bill for the stormwater fee.
- If it's a fee, why is it included on property tax bills?
 - The Partnership looked at several billing options. Adding it to property tax bills proved to be the most efficient, saving postage and processing costs.

- Is there an appeals process?
 - Yes. If you believe the fee was calculated incorrectly, contact Eric Kurtz at 574-533-3630 ext. 3, or download the appeals form at www.stormwaterelkco.org (click on “Frequently Asked Questions”). Appeals must be submitted before the date the stormwater fee is due. If an appeal is denied and the fee has not been paid, late charges will apply. If the fee has been paid and the appeal is upheld, the property owner will be reimbursed.

- I don’t have a storm drain near me.
- I’m on septic and well water.
- I don’t live near a river.
 - The fee is not just for services such as municipal storm sewers. The programs are meant to reduce pollutants in our waterways. Everybody lives in a watershed (an area of land that drains to a body of water). That means that, no matter where a piece of property is, it can have an impact on water quality because the rainwater that falls has to flow somewhere.

- Are other communities charging a fee?
 - Many other cities, towns, and counties in Indiana and across the country are charging a similar fee to meet these same requirements. Elkhart County’s fee is one of the lowest in the state.

- Why don’t you just go after the polluters and fine them?
 - Our pollution problems do not come from a single source, but instead have diverse sources. The Clean Water Act has done a good job of making factories and others with a direct discharge clean up their act. For that reason, water quality has improved substantially in the past 30 years. But our waters are still impaired.

- How are you using the money?
 - The state and federal rules cover everything from public education to street sweeping. Some of the funds are used for infrastructure such as improving drain pipes and systems. Some are used to buy equipment such as street sweepers and vector trucks that remove pollutants and maintain those systems. Some are being used to help landowners disconnect septic systems that discharge sewage to our waterways. Some are used for education materials such as brochures and storm drain markers. Our website, www.stormwaterelkco.org, has more information and people to contact about specific parts of this program.

- Will this really improve water quality?
 - Not overnight. However, we intend to do everything we can to improve water quality through the programs of the Stormwater Partnership. We also need every resident of Elkhart County to do their part. Please visit our website, www.stormwaterelkco.org, and find out what you can do to protect water quality.

Please visit the FAQ page of our web site, www.stormwaterelkco.org, for more information.