

# Identifying Illicit Discharges

Stormwater conveyance systems, like storm drains or drywells, are designed to carry stormwater runoff from roads and properties to nearby waterbodies. This is a traditional means of removing water quickly to avoid flooding and property damage. However, for a variety of reasons, liquids other than stormwater commonly enter the conveyance system. Sometimes there is a misconception that the water or other substance that enters the stormwater conveyance system will be treated and cleaned before it reaches our local waterbodies. However, this is not true. Anything that enters a storm drain will go directly to nearest waterbody or to groundwater without treatment and may cause serious environmental damage. Shelter Island Town Code Chapter 110 prohibits Illicit Discharges. Please see the questions and answers below to learn more about illicit discharges and how to identify an illicit discharge.

## **What is an "illicit discharge" to a stormwater conveyance system?**

An illicit discharge is any discharge to a stormwater conveyance system, river, stream or other waterbody that is not composed entirely of stormwater. An illicit discharge could be the result of someone dumping a pollutant (automobile fluids, paint etc) into the conveyance system; the result of an illicit connection into the conveyance system, such as a sewer pipe connected to the stormwater conveyance system; or a pipe that bypasses the sanitary connection or septic drain field, producing a direct discharge into open channels or streams.

## **What is an "illicit connection" to a stormwater conveyance system?**

An illicit connection is an improper physical connection of illicit discharges to the stormwater conveyance system. Examples include: a sewer pipe that is connected to the

stormwater conveyance system that produces a continuous discharge of raw sewage to the conveyance system, a shop floor drain that is connected to the stormwater conveyance system producing a discharge of wash water or other inappropriate flows into the storm sewer system.

## **What are the hazards associated with illicit discharges?**

Illicit discharges can contribute high levels of pollutants to waterbodies. Pollutants commonly found in illicit discharges include raw sewage (viruses and bacteria), heavy metals, toxics, oil and grease, solvents and nutrients., Pollutant levels from these illicit discharges have been shown in EPA studies to be high enough to significantly degrade water quality, close beaches, and threaten aquatic, wildlife, and human health.

## **So how can you tell a normal stormwater discharge from an illicit discharge?**

Dry weather flow is the best indication that the water coming from an outfall pipe is from an illicit connection. If it has not rained in at least three days and there is water coming from a stormwater outfall pipe, chances are that water is from an illegal source.

Although it is a good indication, dry weather flow is not always from an illicit source. Sometimes groundwater seeps into the stormwater conveyance system and is discharged through the outfall pipe. This is a natural source and is not illicit.

## **When should I report dry weather flow?**

The best way to tell if the dry weather flow is an illicit discharge, and should be reported, is by examining the characteristics of the water being discharged.

1. Does the discharge have a distinct odor?

Some smells coming from an outfall pipe are an immediate indicator of an illicit discharge--for example, a sewage, gasoline, or chemical smell should be reported.

## 2. Is the water cloudy or full of sediment?

Gray water that should be treated at a sewage treatment plant may cause a cloudy appearance in the discharged water. A construction site without proper stormwater best management practices could be discharging sediment to a storm drain. These conditions should be reported.

## 3. Is there anything floating in the discharge?

Soap suds and oil sheens are examples of floatables that may be found in an illicit discharge. These conditions should be reported.

## 4. What color is the discharge?

An abnormally colored discharge is a good indication that there is an illicit connection to the stormwater conveyance system. However sometimes an abnormal color may have a natural cause. For instance, an orange discharge could be naturally occurring from groundwater that is high in iron. However if an abnormal color is coupled with another one of the characteristics listed here (odor, floatables, cloudiness, vegetative growth), it should be reported.

## 5. Is there excessive vegetation around the outfall pipe?

Excessive vegetation around the outfall pipe as opposed to the surrounding area is an indication of increased nutrients in the stormwater discharge. This could be from fertilizers or sewage in the discharge and should be reported.

## **Who do I report this to?**

The building inspector is the town's Stormwater Officer. Call 749-0772.