



What is in Stormwater?

Water from moderate rains is not a concern for most homeowners. The water that is not absorbed into the ground becomes runoff, and then funnels into waterways or is channeled there through storm sewer systems. The Village of Winnetka is fortunate to be served by a separate storm sewer system—meaning no sanitary wastewater from homes or businesses is directed into the storm sewer system. However, stormwater becomes a concern when a) heavy rain events and the volume or velocity of water cause flooding or b) potential contaminants in the water carry pollution to waterways.

One harmful contaminant that can be carried by stormwater is E.coli. E.coli bacteria, however, comes from a variety of sources. Even in studying sources of pollution at impaired beaches, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) did not conclude stormwater was the primary cause of elevated E.coli levels. When water quality samples from stormwater discharges do show elevated levels of E.coli bacteria, these bacteria are often associated with runoff that comes into contact with pet, bird, or other animal waste on the ground.

Village leaders understand community concerns about pollution and the plans for green infrastructure. The Village has developed a draft Stormwater Master Plan that includes an entire chapter devoted to water quality goals, and another chapter devoted to green infrastructure. The Village recently authorized a contract with MWH for the design and engineering of the Willow Road Tunnel and Area Drainage Improvement Projects. MWH is tasked with water quality sampling and modeling to evaluate the considerations such as the optimum number, type, and location of green infrastructure elements and optimal design of the outlet structure for the Willow Road Tunnel that will control sediment and floatable debris, so that the Village's water quality goals and all water quality standards will be met.

While the Willow Road Tunnel would discharge large rainfall events towards the Lake, most of what will be discharged is merely water. Concerns have been expressed that millions of pounds of toxic waste will be discharged into Lake Michigan; this is simply not the case. While engineering has not progressed to the stage of precisely quantifying the pollutant loads in the proposed discharge, MWH will be developing pollutant loading models for stormwater to model existing runoff conditions and proposed discharge conditions, with water quality measures factored in. This information will be developed early on and shared prior to the Village submitting for necessary permits.

Without more detailed study, no one can say what the potential pollution discharge will be. Figures citing 83 million pounds—likely reached by taking 10 million gallons of

stormwater and multiplying it by the weight of water (8.3 pounds)—have not been reached scientifically. Pollutant loads are calculated in concentrations of parts per million, not by total weight. So, even in 10 million gallons of stormwater, a pollutant present at approximately 2 parts per million, would still only equate to 160 pounds of pollutant—not 83 million pounds.

Residents are encouraged to find more information on stormwater pollution and prevention methods on the Village's [website](#).



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