

Preventing stormwater pollution

Earth First

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Orange's urban stormwater system comprises a vast network of drains and waterways that channel water from urban areas into the Ploughmans Creek and Blackmans Swamp Creek waterways.

Two weeks ago, volunteers assisting with Clean up Australia Day collected over a tonne of litter waste and rubbish from three areas along the Blackmans Swamp Creek. Most of the litter was collected on the creek banks and submerged within the creek itself, and included broken glass and plastic bottles, food packaging, cigarette butts, synthetic carpet, plastic bags, a dozen shopping trolleys, and even rusting lead-acid batteries.

In a few months time, Orange City Councils stormwater harvesting scheme is due to commence in the Blackman's Swamp Creek, providing additional water during high flow periods to top up the Suma Park Reservoir. While a large proportion of litter, solid waste and chemical contaminants will be filtered from the stormwater using gross pollutant traps and water treatment facilities, preventing waste rubbish and pollutants from entering the stormwater drains and creeks throughout Orange is a far better remedy.

Facts about our stormwater

Stormwater is water that flows into our drains and waterways from our urban areas, gardens, roads, footpaths and rooftops. In urban catchments, stormwater is also characterised by high-flow runoff proceeding rainfall events, where-as groundwater generally maintains the base flow in creeks as rainfall seeps through the soil profile and bedrock.

In Orange, water quality monitoring in the Ploughmans Creek and Blackmans Swamp Creek catchments reveals that stormwater quality degrades significantly as it passes through the urban, central business and industrial districts of Orange – where levels of salinity, turbidity, suspended solids, pH, dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, nitrogen, and faecal coliforms (from pet droppings) are all reported to be at undesirable levels and concentrations.

Improving stormwater quality

A number of strategies are being implemented in Orange to address the problems of stormwater pollution, including re-establishment of wetlands as water filters, revegetation along creek lines, street sweeping, a leaf collection program, and an education program. It is important that, as a community, we support these strategies and also act responsibly to prevent ongoing stormwater pollution issues.

What you can do to help

To prevent pollution in our stormwater systems and contribute to a cleaner and less contaminated water supply:

- Dispose of all items of rubbish responsibly, including cigarette butts
- Prevent pet droppings from washing into gutters and creeks
- Reduce fertiliser use on your gardens and lawns, particularly before rain
- Recycle oils and chemicals, and avoid using detergents outside your home
- Rake up leaves and grass clippings – use them as mulch on the garden instead
- Set-up sediment traps wherever soil erosion may occur
- Report illegal dumping of rubbish or polluting activities to Orange City Council.

We can all make a difference to reduce stormwater pollution and improve the health of our important waterways and creeks.

Source of information: Stormwater Management Plan for the City of Orange, Orange City Council, April 2008.

Green dates for the Calendar:

Saturday 28 March – Earth Hour 830pm (see <http://www.earthhour.org>)

Reminder: ECCO/OCAN Autumn Environmental Awards OPEN NOW.