



Yakima County Stormwater Utility FAQ's

Public Services – Water Resources ◆ 128 N. 2nd Street 4th Floor Courthouse - Yakima, Washington 98901 ◆ Phone (509) 574-2300

Stormwater utilities in each community provide revenue to pay for operation and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure and permit compliance for stormwater discharge. Yakima County has a stormwater utility in order to fund the stormwater management program to meet the requirements of the current National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Eastern Washington Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit.

Yakima County has developed this document to answer some frequently asked questions about the stormwater utility.

- **What is the stormwater utility?**

A stormwater utility generates revenue by charging users, property owners, a fee based on the expected amount of stormwater runoff from the property. These fees are then used to implement stormwater management programs in a given jurisdiction.

Yakima County's stormwater utility was created in 2008. The utility assesses an annual user fee to approximately 10,500 parcels within the service area and generates an operating budget of approximately \$500,000 in order to fund stormwater management activities required by the Eastern Washington Phase II Municipal Stormwater permit.

- **Why does Yakima County need a stormwater utility?**

The United States EPA issued new stormwater regulations in 1999 that require communities the size of Yakima, Union Gap, Selah, Sunnyside, and urban Yakima County to control water pollution from stormwater runoff. These communities are required to implement stormwater management programs that will reduce stormwater pollution discharges. Washington State Department of Ecology, that administers the NPDES program in Washington, issued the Eastern Washington Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit on February 16, 2007 and reissues the permit every five years. The permit requires communities that meet certain criteria to perform six control measures, comply with any TMDL processes and monitor the effectiveness of their program.



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- **How are stormwater utility service areas determined? Where is Yakima County's stormwater utility area?**

Utility service areas are determined by each jurisdiction. Service areas are based on the area of coverage defined in the Eastern Washington Phase II Municipal Stormwater permit, which is determined from population density gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau. Permit areas are either the incorporated area of a permitted city or the urbanized areas and urban growth areas surrounding permitted cities. Most jurisdictions set utility service area boundaries based on this definition. Yakima County's stormwater utility service area is the Urban Growth Area surrounding the cities of Yakima, Selah, Union Gap, and Sunnyside.

- **What is the stormwater utility fee used for?**

Stormwater utilities in each community provide revenue to pay for operation and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure and permit compliance for stormwater discharges. Yakima County's stormwater utility pays for a wide variety of services and activities. The following is a list of some of the primary services and activities:

- Inspection of construction sites for erosion and sediment control
- Inspection of private stormwater facilities for operation and maintenance
- Review of development plans for surface water management
- Response to citizen inquiries, violation reports, and complaints
- Detection and elimination of prohibited discharges to the storm sewer system
- Storm sewer system mapping
- Public drainage and storm sewer maintenance, repair, and improvement
- Water quality improvement activities (regulatory and local needs based)
- Water quality improvement projects
 - Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)
 - Stormwater Facility Retrofits
- Public outreach and education activities
- Recordkeeping and report preparation

- **How is the stormwater utility fee calculated?**

Stormwater fees are assessed based on the land use and amount of impervious surface on each parcel. Each property is assessed the stormwater fee based on the number of Equivalent Residential Units (ERUs), or



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amount of impervious surface, on the parcel. One ERU is defined as the average amount of impervious surface for a single-family residential home, approximately 3,600 square feet. Every year, the process begins by classifying parcels in the utility into one of the following categories, based on land use:

- Residential
- Commercial/Industrial (includes government, military, schools, churches, apartments, mobile home parks, etc.)
- Agricultural
- Exempt

After each parcel is classified, Yakima County uses GIS to determine the amount of impervious surface, the number of ERU, on each parcel in the utility. Residential parcels are charged the base rate, one ERU. Commercial and industrial parcels are charged the base rate multiplied by the number of ERU on the parcel. Agricultural parcels within the utility are charged based on parcel size.

- **What is impervious surface?**

Impervious surface means those disturbed or hard surfaced areas that either slow or stop the natural entry of water into the soil. Rooftops, buildings, streets, parking lots, sidewalks, asphalt, concrete, compacted gravel, other paving, driveways, patios, artificial turf and storage areas are all examples of impervious surfaces. These improvements affect natural infiltration, create more runoff, increase the rate of runoff and alter runoff patterns of stormwater that drains from an area.

- **No water runs off my property. Why am I being charged a stormwater fee?**

Almost every property discharges some stormwater into the public drainage systems, even if it is not noticeable to you. Many properties generally discharge runoff during snow melt when ground conditions are frozen. If absolutely no stormwater drains from your property, even during severe storms or periods of frozen ground, you may still be served by the existence of a stormwater management program.

Public properties also discharge to the public drainage system, thus stormwater from the roads you drive on, parks you recreate in, and emergency service facilities you rely on contribute to stormwater pollution. Keep in mind that a lot of stormwater does run off from other properties. Properly controlling that stormwater runoff is a very real service to you and other property owners.



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Stormwater is not treated and the pollutants in stormwater go to area creeks, streams, and lakes and impact the health of people, fish, wildlife and other natural resources that depend on those habitats. That same water is pumped for irrigation on crops and for use as drinking water. Stormwater quality affects everyone, even though the sources are generally a result of urbanization.

- **Isn't this just another tax?**

No. The stormwater utility fee is a user fee. Although the fee is a cost to property owners, it is not a tax on the value of the property – it is assessed depending on the amount of impervious surface which is related to the amount of stormwater runoff. This is similar to fees collected to handle and manage solid waste.

- **How does the stormwater utility benefit me?**

Everyone benefits from the stormwater management activities, whether runoff leaves your property or not. Funds from the stormwater utility pay for improvements to the public stormwater system, which reduces flooding risk and improves public safety during storms. Activities funded by the stormwater utility also improve water quality of our local streams, like the Naches and Yakima Rivers, preserving the health and safety of everyone that enjoys playing in and around these beautiful natural resources.

- **Where can I get more information?**

For more information, please visit Yakima County's stormwater management website:

<https://www.yakimacounty.us/1732/Stormwater-Management>

If you have any other questions, please feel free to call 509-574-2300 or email WaterResources@co.yakima.wa.us and we'd be happy to help you.