

STORMWATER UTILITY PROGRAM

The Problem With Stormwater

For many Dade Countians, the scent in the air after a summer rainstorm is one of the simple pleasures of life in South Florida. With an average of 60 inches of rainfall every year, storms constantly wash away the dirt and pollution of our urban activities, leaving streets, buildings, and even the air we breathe, fresh and clean.

Most people, however, don't stop to think about where the grime goes when the rain has washed it away. But as our cities have grown, dirty stormwater has become an increasing problem for the environment. Areas where open soil once soaked up the rain are now covered with concrete and buildings.

As a result, the contaminated stormwater flows unfiltered into canals, rivers, lakes, Biscayne Bay, and eventually the Atlantic Ocean. Many of the contaminants—such as petroleum products washed from roads, pesticides and herbicides from lawns and farm fields, and residues from industrial sites—can be harmful to humans, animals, plants and fish. Consequently, stormwater is recognized as a major contributor to surface water pollution in many areas of Florida.

In response to this problem, Metro-Dade has become one of 53 local governments in Florida to establish a Stormwater Utility Program.

Aiming Toward a Cleaner Environment

The objectives of the Stormwater Utility Program include improvements and maintenance of existing local drainage systems, and development of a comprehensive master plan for the design, construction and operation of improved drainage systems throughout the county's public storm sewer system. The major goal of the program is to reduce the amount of pollutants discharged into surface waters. Another benefit will be better drainage and less flooding of roadways and developed property.



Miami after a summer shower

Photo by Argelio Hernandez

The Utility

Dade County's Stormwater Utility Program was created in response to new requirements mandated by federal and state agencies. These include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System, which requires permit regulations for stormwater discharge, and also the Florida Air and Water Pollution Control Act, which allows for the establishment of utility fees for the construction, planning, operation, and maintenance of public stormwater utility systems.

In Dade County, the Utility is administered by the Department of Environmental Resources Management (DERM). The Department is now implementing a two-step, two-year application and permitting process involving the entire county. The resulting information will be used to evaluate stormwater systems county-wide in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

DERM will also increase water quality evaluation and monitoring activities and will pursue a plan to eliminate substandard stormwater systems.

Sources of Funding

Pursuant to Dade County Ordinance 91-66, the Stormwater Utility may assess user fees on all developed property in Dade County. These revenues will be used exclusively to pay for planning, construction, operation, and maintenance of public stormwater management systems. For most property owners, the fees are posted on regular water & sewer bills. Assessments are determined by a formula which takes several factors into consideration, including whether the property is developed for residential or commercial use, and how much of the property is covered by an "impervious area." (Note: "impervious area" is that area of the property that is incapable of being penetrated by rainwater because it is covered by pavement or buildings.) For those properties not served by the County's public water system, bills are sent directly from the Stormwater Utility to the owner.

Everyone Benefits

Projects developed by the Stormwater Utility will have many benefits for the people and the environment of Dade County. Cleaner surface water in our lakes, canals, rivers, bay and ocean is just the beginning. By building a comprehensive stormwater system, Dade County will also benefit from better flood control, which will reduce the damage to property and danger to human life caused by South Florida's heavy rains.

For further information about the Stormwater Utility, call 372-6660, or write to:

Metro-Dade Stormwater Utility
33 SW 2nd Avenue
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