

# **Answers to Your Questions about Your Storm Water Service Fee Hamilton County, Ohio**

## **1. What Is a Storm Water Service Fee?**

In 1999, the federal government issued new storm water regulations requiring counties and cities to reduce water pollution associated with storm water runoff. Hamilton County is required to implement a municipal storm water management program (SWMP) that will reduce storm water pollutant discharges to the “maximum extent practicable.” The storm water service fee in Hamilton County is a charge for the County’s services in implementing the SWMP mandated by the recent federal storm water regulations.

### **1.1 What is the Hamilton County Storm Water District?**

Consistent with provisions in the Ohio Revised Code, in 2003 the County organized a Storm Water District (“the District”) comprised of 44 participating jurisdictions throughout the County. Non-participating jurisdictions include the following: City of Loveland, City of Harrison, City of Forest Park, City of Springdale, and City of Reading. The District has authority by Ohio state law to raise funds to perform specific public services related to storm water management, including the implementation of the SWMP. At present the District’s services are limited to storm water quality improvement through implementation of the SWMP. The District currently provides no storm water quantity related services. All funds collected from the storm water service fee will only be used for the Storm Water District’s services in implementing the SWMP.

## **2. Why a New Service Fee to Address the Quality of Storm Water Runoff?**

The rain that falls on our streets runs off and carries with it pollutants such as oil, gasoline, and heavy metals. Pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers are washed from lawns and other green space. With the passage of time, these pollutants build up in the waterways causing significant environmental damage to our lakes, creeks, and

streams. These pollutants may then percolate into the groundwater aquifer, threatening our drinking water supply as well as posing an environmental threat.

### **3. Why Is This Issue Being Addressed at This Time?**

The EPA has listed six control measures that communities must implement as part of any municipal storm water management program. These include: public education and outreach on storm water, public involvement and participation, illicit discharge detection and elimination, construction site storm water runoff control, post-construction storm water management in new development and redevelopment and pollution prevention/good housekeeping for municipal operations. The storm water service fee will provide the County with the tools necessary to meet the new regulation requirements.

### **4. What is an SFU?**

Billing units for the service fee are referred to as **Single Family Units (SFUs)**. One **SFU** is one billing unit. Because the amount of storm water runoff from any property can generally be equated to the size of the area on the property that is covered by hard surfaces (i.e., impervious areas), the storm water service fee uses the average impervious area associated with one single family detached home as the base unit for the rate policy. Within the boundaries of the Hamilton County Storm Water District, the average property containing one single family dwelling unit has been determined to contain 3,300 square feet of hard surface (impervious) area; therefore, **one SFU is equal to 3,300 square feet.**

### **5. How was the Billing Rate Determined?**

The **Billing Rate** for one SFU ranges from \$2.16 to \$4.86 per year, depending on the specific services that the District has been asked to provide within the jurisdiction where the property is located. The District has established a tiered residential rate structure based on a statistical analysis that indicates a relatively wide variation in the amount of impervious area associated with different types of residential units. Most

single family residential properties contain between 1,630 and 4,540 square feet of impervious areas and will be charged one (1) SFU.

**6. What If My Residential Property is Smaller than the Average Billing Unit – OR – What If My Residential Property is Larger than the Average Billing Unit?**

Single family residential properties with less than 1,630 square feet of impervious area will be charged one-half (1/2) of an SFU, or \$1.08 to \$2.43 per year, while single family residential properties with more than 4,540 square feet of impervious area will be charged 1.4 SFUs, or \$3.02 to \$6.80 per year.

**7. What if I own a multi-family residential property?**

Owners of duplex, triplex, properties, and multi-family properties (i.e., apartments) will be charged 0.4 SFUs per dwelling unit. For instance, if an apartment building has 10 apartment units, the owner of the property would be charged 4 SFUs (0.4 x 10 dwelling units = 4 SFUs). Condominium owners will also be charged 0.4 SFUs per unit.

**8. How was the storm water fee established for non-residential properties?**

The SFU is used to calculate the billing rate for non-residential properties (e.g., businesses, government, schools, churches, and other institutions) by measuring the total hard surface area on the property, dividing it by the area of an SFU (3,300 sq. ft.) and multiplying that by the SFU Billing Rate of \$2.16 to \$4.86 per year. In this way a business or other non-residential entity will be charged in the same proportion as a single family residence. A business that has ten times the hard surface area of an average single family residence will pay a bill that is ten times that of a residence, etc.

**9. Who else charges a storm water service fee?**

Several communities in Ohio have already established a storm water service fee. The rate is different based on local conditions such as land use and storm water management needs. In Ohio, example residential rates for water quality related

services such as those provided by the District range from \$5 to \$36 per billing unit per year. Neighboring counties that have a storm water service fee include Butler County (\$13 per year per residential unit) and Warren County (\$15 per year per residential unit).

#### **10. What Is an Impervious Surface Area? Is a Gravel Surface Impervious?**

Impervious surfaces are those that do not absorb water such as roofs, driveways, walks and parking lots. Impervious areas can have many types of surfaces or simply be areas of compacted ground. Gravel parking areas are considered impervious because the ground under the gravel must be compacted sufficiently to support vehicles and this compaction makes it virtually impervious. Picture a paved area that has been covered with gravel. The gravel may slow the flow of water from the area, but nearly the same amount of runoff will flow from the area under the gravel as if the gravel was not there. Many flat roofs are covered with gravel, but they still shed the rainwater that falls on them. In general, all areas that have surfaces that are sufficiently hard such that they do not support vegetation are considered impervious and are counted toward the total area used to calculate the SFUs for a property.

#### **11. I Maintain a Retention Pond on My Property. Do I Get Any Fee Reduction for This?**

All new or remodeled industrial, commercial and residential complexes are required to provide some form of storm water retention to satisfy current County policy requirements. Older properties that do not have them have been “grandfathered” since they were constructed before the policy required them. There is no practical way to penalize a property for the additional runoff it creates as a result of outdated policies; but likewise, there is no way to give credit to properties for devices that are now required by the policy to be a part of the site improvements. In order for a property to receive a credit for an improvement, the improvement would need to be an improvement that is in excess of policy requirements that results in a savings in cost to the District. The District is presently finalizing a credit policy, which upon its completion will be downloadable from the District’s website at the following URL address: <http://www.hamilton-co.org/stormwater>

**12. My Organization is Tax-Exempt, Is There A Subsidy That I Can Apply For?**

No, all developed land uses regardless of tax status pays a storm water user fee. Bills for tax-exempt properties will be mailed later in 2005.

**13. If I Think My Fee is Wrong, How Can I Appeal?**

The District is presently finalizing an appeals process whereby a property owner can submit calculations, measurements and any other relevant information to the District and the District will make a determination as to whether an adjustment is appropriate. Forms for submitting an appeal are being finalized and will be made available on the District's website (<http://www.hamilton-co.org/stormwater>). Adjustments may be retroactive up to six months prior to the date an appeal is filed. Disputed fees must be paid; otherwise the account in question will become delinquent.

**14. How Do I Apply for a Credit or a Fee Adjustment?**

Forms for applying for credits or fee adjustments are being finalized and will be made available on the District's website (<http://www.hamilton-co.org/stormwater>).

**15. Where Can I Go For More Information?**

If you would like additional information on the storm water service fee or have specific concerns about storm water issues, please call the Hamilton County Engineer's Office at (513) 946 - 4254. Billing questions should be directed to Mr. Todd Long.

**16. What Is The Penalty If I Do Not Pay My Storm Water Service Fee?**

Delinquent accounts will be assessed a late charge of 10% of the amount due per the County's Storm Water Service Fee Resolution passed by the Board of County Commissioners.