

"Federation Corner" column
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Focus on two environmental issues

Devising a strategy to control stormwater runoff by Ginny Barnes, Co-Chair, MCCF Environment Committee

Some of Montgomery County's polluted stormwater runoff is transported through Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s), from which it is discharged into local bodies of water. To prevent harmful pollutants from being washed or dumped into an MS4, the County must obtain a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and develop a stormwater management program.

Montgomery County's most recent stormwater permit from the U.S. EPA was issued in February 2010. It is an ambitious and ground breaking effort for which we can thank our Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Director Bob Hoyt as well as the hard work of the Stormwater Partners Network of which MCCF is a partner.

Now comes the hard part. The Stormwater Permit requires the implementation of restoration on twenty percent of all impervious surfaces not currently controlled to the maximum extent practicable (MEP) over the next five years, in addition to a ten percent restoration requirement from the previous permit cycle. Restoration is defined as the managing of stormwater from impervious surfaces (such as roads, parking lots, driveways, buildings) by use of either structural treatments (such as engineered ponds) or equivalent non-structural practices (like infiltration of parking lot runoff into a forested buffer area, stream restoration, riparian reforestation and public education and outreach).

In practical terms this means creating a many-armed strategy to control runoff on an additional 4,300 acres of impervious surface throughout the county. We currently have an overall impervious cover of twelve percent or 35,965 acres. Runoff is funneled at a high volume and velocity off these hard surfaces during storms, creating a 'fire hose' effect, scouring stream channels and killing aquatic life. This causes further flooding and erosion problems downstream.

Adding insult to the injury created by this high volume and velocity of untreated runoff is the wide array of pollutants it carries including bacteria, trash, nutrients and sediment—all of them contributors to a dying Chesapeake Bay. Our permit requires limits--called Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)--on such pollutants in order for downstream receiving waters to meet their designated uses, e.g. fishing, swimming.

New ways of addressing runoff such as low impact development (LID) and environmental site design (ESD) have been added to the structural restoration program. Small scale voluntary rain gardens on private and public properties, pet waste management, recycling, hazardous waste collection, illegal dumping prevention and enforcement and volunteer road clean-up all contribute to our collective ability to control pollutants carried in stormwater run-off.

The Stormwater Partners have raised the need for additional attention to stormwater volume reduction and boosting the role of green growing plants such as trees, forests and green roofs in attenuating, filtering and infiltrating runoff. MCCF will be working with DEP on improving their Draft Implementation Strategy for the county's MS4 Permit.

Questions about artificial turf playing fields by Paula Bienenfeld, Chair, MCCF Education Committee

Last November 2010 sharp-eyed citizen Bob Astrove noticed 19 bags of ground rubber tire material being delivered to the 2-year-old artificial turf (AT) field at Richard Montgomery High School. The question was, why? And how much crumb rubber was in those 19 bags?

In November I asked these questions of the County Council. Keith Levchenko, Senior Legislative Analyst for the County Council, responded on March 17th, 2011, with these answers.

1. How much did the 19 bags cost taxpayers?—No cost. FieldTurf (the company that installed the field) added the infill under warranty.
2. How much crumb rubber was in the bags, by weight?—Approximately 2,000 pounds per bag for a total of 38,000 pounds.
3. How was the crumb rubber in the 19 bags applied to the field?—A spreader and brush were used to apply the crumb rubber to the field.
4. Where did the crumb rubber go that was in the original field? Did it go into the storm drains?—FieldTurf Response: “The field settled because not enough infill was put in initially or had rubber removed due to plowing (this is 99.9% of the reason for low infill rates). Sometimes at installation due to a variety of reasons (weather, static electricity, operator error, etc.), not all infill is put into the field that is needed. Also snow plowing fields can lead to rubber removal if not done correctly. We decided to just infill it to the proper level under warranty instead of inquiring about snow removal techniques. However, if it happens again, more than likely it will be the result of improper snow plowing. One of the major reasons that Montgomery County only installs Fieldturf is the pervious backing coupled with our patented infill. By not having holes in the backing to be pervious, and combined with its patented infill, the Fieldturf infill does not migrate from the field vertically or laterally like many of our competitors. No infill from a Fieldturf field is lost to the Storm Sewers.”
5. If so, is a permit required to allow 19 bags worth of used auto and truck tires to be dumped into the Chesapeake Bay, and does MCPS have this permit?—No permit was required for adding the infill to the RM field.

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to theelms518@earthlink.net