



# Fact Sheet

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD | 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 | Mailing Address: P. O. Box 100, Sacramento, CA 95812-0100 | [www.waterboards.ca.gov](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov)

## Storm Water Management in California

### Stopping the Spread of Pollution

Water runoff from our cities, highways, industrial facilities and construction sites can carry pollutants that harm water quality and impair the beneficial uses of our waters - beneficial uses that belong to all Californians and entrusted to us to protect. For nearly two decades, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) and the US Environmental Protection Agency have regulated the runoff and treatment of storm water in industrial, municipal and residential areas of California. The effort falls into several distinct categories with the same goal to use storm water as a resource and to reduce harmful pollutants, fertilizers, debris and other materials carried into storm drains, drainage systems and ultimately our rivers, lakes, and ocean.

While early program efforts focused on controlling pollutants and implementing good management practices, the program is now also emphasizing holistic strategies aimed at not only preventing problems but providing many community benefits. Storm water is an important resource and Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure techniques are now capitalizing on opportunities in California. The goal is to capture the water that runs off concrete and non-permeable surfaces and use it, for example, to water trees, plants and other living things on the same plot of land from which it would flow away. Groundwater supplies are replenished, too, and the amount of pollutants that flow into our waterways is reduced.

### Federal and State Partnership

The Water Boards draw authority for storm water regulation from the federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) and from direction within the Clean Water Act which puts the framework for regulating storm water discharges under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit system.

Cities and other jurisdictions that operate large and medium and small storm water systems as well as specific industrial activity sites, including construction sites that disturb more than an acre of land, must apply for storm water permits. The State Water Board provides policy and regulatory oversight, on behalf of the federal government.

### California has Several Storm Water Regulatory Program Areas

- **Construction:** Projects that disturb one or more acres of soil or that disturb less than one acre but are part of a larger common plan of development, are required to obtain coverage under the General Permit for Discharges of Storm Water Associated with Construction Activity. The permit is based on a project's overall risk and requires measures to prevent erosion and reduce sediment and other pollutants in their discharges. There have been as many as 15,000 active permittees in this program area in the past. ([SWRCB Order No. 2009-0009-DWQ](#) was adopted in 2009 and became effective July 1, 2010).
- **Industrial:** Specific industrial activities must use the best technology available to reduce pollutants in their discharges. In addition, they are required to develop both a storm water pollution prevention plan and a way to monitor their progress. There is an average of 10,000 active permittees in this program area. ([SWRCB Order No. 97-03-DWQ](#) is expired and its [replacement](#) is undergoing public review in 2011).

- **Municipal:** Large and small municipal sewer system operators must comply with permits that regulate storm water entering their systems under a two phase system. Phase 1 regulates storm water permits for medium (serving between 100,000 and 250,000 people) and large (serving 250,000 people) municipalities. The second phase regulates smaller municipalities, including non-traditional small operations, such as military bases, public campuses, and prison and hospital complexes. The largest, single municipal discharger in California is the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and their network of highways and road facilities. In addition to Caltrans there are 21 Phase I municipal permits and 125 permittees enrolled in the statewide Phase II municipal permit. (*Caltrans Status: [Pending Public Review](#)*). (*Phase II Status: [SWRCB Order No. 2003-0005-DWQ](#) is expired and its replacement will undergo public review in the second half of 2011*).

## Emerging Areas for Study, Regulation and Monitoring

Recent legislation and awareness of environmental challenges have led to innovative approaches in storm water runoff management and regulation. In addition, the Water Board has established an online database to allow regulated entities to view reports and information on water quality control efforts with storm water. Please visit the Stormwater Multiple Application and Report Tracking System – ([SMARTS](#)) here:

<https://smarts.waterboards.ca.gov/smarts/faces/SwSmartsLogin.jsp>

- **[Regulation of Pre-Production Plastics](#)** – The discharge of pre-production plastic pellets via storm water threatens California's aquatic environment. Potential sources of preproduction plastic pellets include manufacturers, transporters, warehouse, processors, and recyclers. Some industrial facilities that either produce or handle these plastic pellets are covered by the industrial permit. The Water Boards are investigating all aspects of this emerging area and taking appropriate actions.
- **[Low Impact Development \(LID\) and Green Infrastructure \(GI\)](#)** - LID is a sustainable practice that benefits water supply and contributes to water quality protection. Unlike traditional storm water management, which collects and conveys storm water runoff through storm drains, pipes, or other conveyances to a centralized storm water facility, LID takes a different approach by using site design and storm water management to maintain the site's pre-development runoff rates and volumes. GI carries this approach to a larger, community scale and presents similar, sustainable opportunities to local governments and regional projects. The Water Boards are leading the way towards more water-friendly landscapes in California.
- **[Effects of Changes in Flows and Sediment Loads to Waterways](#)** – Changes in flow and sediment loads to streams and other watercourses can result in significant and long-standing impacts to beneficial uses of our waters. These changes are collectively referred to as "hydromodification." The Water Boards have teamed with some of the nation's top scientists to devise ground breaking ways to effectively and efficiently measure and control the impacts associated with hydromodification.

## Storm Water Management Oversight and Regulation a Priority

The Water Boards have been focused for more than 20 years in the area of storm water quality management and regulation. The Water Boards continue to strive to ensure that surface and ground water resources remain useful and managed in a sustainable manner for generations to come.

For more information please visit the following links or contact us directly:

[http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/stormwater/](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/)

- General Inquiries: [stormwater@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:stormwater@waterboards.ca.gov)
- Telephone Toll Free - 1-866-563-3107