Where does the water go – storm water?

First in a series by Jeff Weiss, founder of the Buffalo Grove Environmental Action Team and Buffalo Creek Clean Water Partnership

A recent survey conducted online by The Harris Poll in November 2023 among over 2,000 U.S. adults showed that when it comes to water, environmental impact is top of mind for most Americans but they really don't know much about water.[i]

According to the results, more than half of U.S. citizens (51%) are concerned about the current infrastructure in place to manage storm water within their communities. In recent years, Buffalo Grove has "shored" up its defenses against regional flooding, but older low-lying neighborhoods are still flood prone.

The survey also revealed confusion among U.S. adults about how water is managed. More than half of Americans (53%) do not know where water goes after it leaves their home, which would include how it is stored and treated before being returned back to the environment. Presumably this response applies to both storm water and waste water from homes.

This article will discuss storm water and what residents can do to minimize their impact. A future article will discuss wastewater.

What you should know is that rainwater and snow melt from your Buffalo Grove property run into storm sewers and one of four creeks – Indian, Aptakisic, Buffalo or McDonald – that drain the village. They all end up in the Des Plaines River, which flows into the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, and eventually into the Gulf of Mexico. Buffalo Creek is particularly flood prone, especially south of Lake Cook and west of Buffalo Grove Roads. The Village has taken steps to improve drainage in this area, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) recently expanded the basin at Buffalo Creek Forest Preserve to hold more floodwater and protect that neighborhood and downstream communities such as Des Plaines.

Despite these precautions, a large rain event can fill the reservoir and cause widespread flooding. The last time this happened was in June 2014 and prompted the basin expansion project. Flood events also wash

large amounts of pollution into the water. Record levels of phosphorus, fecal coliform bacteria and suspended solids were measured in Buffalo Creek during the June 2014 deluge.

What can homeowners do to mitigate these issues? There are several actions that are fairly easy and effective:

1. Allow water from your downspouts and sump pump to run across your yard to disperse water and allow it to soak in. Underground pipes that direct rainwater away from your property add to flooding. They are also illegal under village ordinances and can result in a citation and fine.
2. Install rain barrels and rain gardens to catch and hold rainwater. They capture and store rainwater and provide other benefits. For more information, write to Jeff Weiss at marjeff1@aol.com/.
3. Recycle yard waste and keep storm sewer grates clear of debris.
4. Join the team. Buffalo Grove Environmental Action Team sponsors stream cleanups and other projects across the village. https://www.bgparks.org/information/environmental-action-team/.
5. Learn more about the Infrastructure Modernization Program. https://www.vbg.org/the_future_of_buffalo_grove/infrastructure_modernization/infrastructure_modernization_program.php.

About the author: Jeff Weiss and his wife Martha have resided in Buffalo Grove for more than 40 years in homes in Cook and Lake County Buffalo Grove. They started the Buffalo Grove Environmental Action Team together in 2008, and Jeff founded the Buffalo Creek Clean Water Partnership in 2012. Both groups work with the Village, Park District and other agencies on a range of projects and issues related to environmental sustainability and green infrastructure.

Next topic: Where does the water go – wastewater?

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[i] Stormwater Soluions Magazine press release; December 20, 2023; https://www.stormwater.com/stormwater-management/press-release/53080861/ads-survey-over-half-of-americans-concerned-about-stormwater-management?oly_enc_id=1884G8339567A6V