



Looking For Renovation? [Learn More](#)

ENVIRONMENT

Stepping up to stormwater rules

What new stormwater runoff rules mean to you

By Deborah Sullivan Brennan (/staff/deborah-brennan/) 06:00a.m. Jul 6, 2014



Imagine a city without rainspouts, where precipitation funnels into cisterns or barrels instead. Envision parks with flower-filled basins that catch and trap runoff. Picture streets that absorb rain as it falls.

These features may seem like a green dream, but they're on the horizon — the result of water officials passing a new stormwater permit last year.

The permit organizes the county into distinct watersheds, or broad areas that feed individual streams and rivers — and ultimately flow to the ocean. It calls for city and county governments to set numeric goals for reducing contaminants in each of these areas, so the flow of “urban drool” into the ocean is reduced.

containers in each of those areas, so the flow of urban runoff into the ocean is reduced.

What does this mean for residents and businesses?

You'll have to curtail your watering habits, dialing back sprinklers to make sure nothing spills into the streets. Those Saturday car washes that leave your vehicle sparkling and your gutter foaming will be a thing of the past.

One example for business owners: If you use outdoor storage, you'll have to keep a lid on leaks.

In September, the San Diego City Council is set to consider a set of rules aimed at changing the way people manage their water. Bill Harris, spokesman for the city's stormwater division, has spent years spreading the word about pollution prevention. Those efforts range from corporate and community presentations to San Diego's pointedly comedic "Think Blue" commercials.

Harris spoke to U-T San Diego about what's coming on the stormwater front. Here is an edited version of the conversation:

Q: What is the key change created by the new permit?

A: It makes us more responsible and forces the city to be a lot more pointed in ensuring that we take the measures we've talked about for a long time. We're going to have to literally end over-irrigation. Businesses will have to make sure that dumpsters don't leak into storm drains. Everything we build today is going to have to capture the 85th percentile storm. You're going to have to build rain gardens, berms, bio-retention basins and cisterns.

Q: You've been involved in the process since the beginning — and have warned that the requirements could be costly. How can we make compliance cost-effective?

A: It's cost-challenging, that's the best way of putting it. We estimated when we initially went to the City Council that compliance costs alone would be in excess of \$2 billion. In addition to that, there's more than \$1.5 billion merely to upgrade and maintain our system over the course of the 20 years we're looking at. We've estimated that we need about \$130 million each year. By comparison, that's almost equivalent to parks and recreation and library costs combined. When you look at that as a hard choice that has to be made, you really find that you get motivated to find solutions. You get motivated to build rain gardens You get motivated to change streets, to have pervious pavement near the curb. Every drop of water that we can prevent from going into the (storm-drain) system, it's going to make a difference in those costs, and it's going to make a difference in how we can protect our ocean.

Q: Some of the cost discussion has focused on infrastructure versus behavior. If we can get people to change the way they deal with runoff, we won't need as many expensive facilities to control it. How will that work?

A: If everybody were to stop over-irrigation, that would be a huge step. We wouldn't see the huge flows that we do. There are creeks and rivers in San Diego that run year-round. They're not supposed to. You've heard the statistic that 50 percent of the water we use is used outdoors. There's another statistic that 40 percent of the (outdoor water use) is wasted. The city has to make some hard financial choices to live up to the stormwater pollution regulations. We can do that the most economical way, which is to change our behavior and live up to

our personal responsibilities, or we can start spending a lot of money to build very large treatment facilities. We would prefer to do it the most economical way, of course — everybody taking a little bit of the effort.

Q: What are some of the most significant changes people should make at home?

A: For homeowners, again be sure that you are eliminating over-irrigation. Make sure your sprinkler system is using the bare amount of water for the landscape you have in mind and is staying off your driveway, off the sidewalk and out of the curb and gutter. You have to be sure you're not inadvertently introducing pollutants into the storm-drain system. Even if you wash your car on your lawn, if you saturate that lawn with soapy material, if you put too much pesticide on your roses that then could wash into the storm-drain system, that's a problem. And really button up your trash cans and don't litter. Trash and debris are unsightly, of course, and they also breed bacteria. We've got a lot of things to help you with that. We've got rebates for rain barrels, turf replacement and smart irrigation.

Q: What should business owners do?

A: For businesses, look at your systems and don't let your dumpsters drip. Look at your disposal practices. Do not let wash water or water you're using to clean something enter the storm-drain system. Lastly, if you can cut back on your water use, that's important.

Q: What enforcement actions are in the works?

A: In September, we're going to (ask) the City Council to change our municipal code. Irrigation runoff discharges shall be eliminated — not curtailed, not cut back, but eliminated — through proper landscape maintenance and watering practices. That means no more over-irrigation, and that becomes enforceable. You're going to see code-compliance people out and about, enforcing, writing tickets for that. Runoff from pavement, rooftops and other impervious surfaces shall — not may, not could be, not might be, but shall — be directed to landscaped or other pervious areas where feasible. And if it's infeasible, you're going to have to prove it.

Q: You coined the term “poop police” in reference to sanctions against uncollected pet waste. What are the citations people might face if they don't get on board?

A: Pet waste presents a very specific problem because it's full of bacteria. There is a lot of (pet) waste left behind. We as a community have to stand up to that and make sure we're taking personal responsibility for our pets. We have to understand that it is not natural, and that we have to pick up each and every time. A lot of the permit costs that we've quoted are driven by the need to reduce and eliminate bacteria. And this is one well-known, specific cause of bacterial pollution.

Q: What are some infrastructure investments San Diego is making to comply with the new rules?

A: (Our estimated compliance costs) include more than 200 miles of streets being converted to “complete streets.” We're looking at library parking lots having vegetated swales or bio-retention basins. Businesses are going to have to look at how they manage stormwater. The biggest change is they're going to have to retain water on their property. For outdoor trash receptacles, dumpsters, it's going to be mandatory that they remain closed. But moreover, they're going to have to be contained within berms.

Q: What have you done at your own home?

A: I pulled my lawn up nine years ago. Much to my neighbors' chagrin, I didn't put much back down. It's not the prettiest thing, but it hasn't had a single drop of water in nine years. I look forward to when I will have the time and money to do something creative (with that spot), but my personal decision was to cut back to zero.

Q: Why does all of this matter to San Diego?

A: It matters a great deal. It matters because so much of how we define ourselves rests on our association with the ocean. We must protect our ocean. It defines us, it supports us, it distinguishes us from other communities.

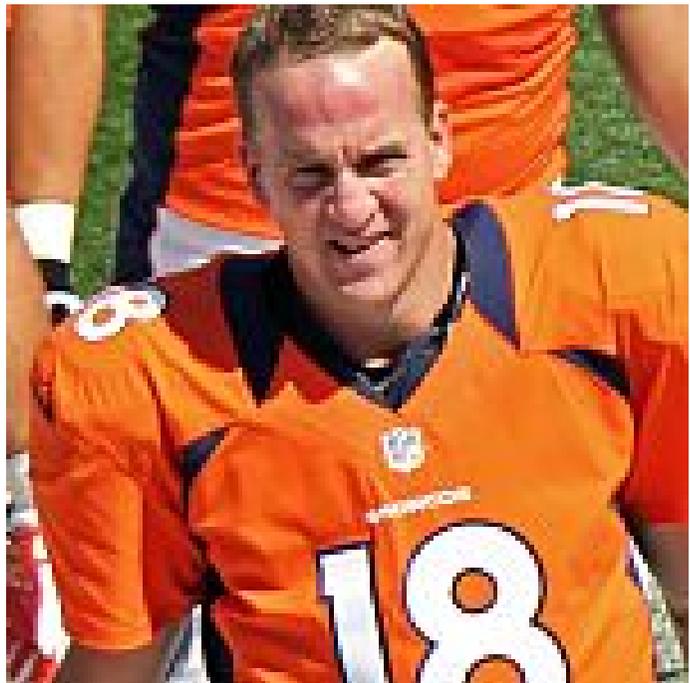
f (http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2011/Dec/21/2m-bail-for-accused-killer-in-hells-angels-brawl/) 16 COMMENTS

You Might Like



\$2M bail for accused killer in Hells Angels brawl

(http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2011/Dec/21/2m-bail-for-accused-killer-in-hells-angels-brawl/)



Denver Broncos: Disaster or Opportunity?
(Forbes)

(http://www.forbes.com/sites/netapp/2014/05/07/denver-broncos-disaster-recovery/)

(http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2012/Sep/05/death-a-part-of-life-at-del-mar-racetrack/)

