FAQ

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What is stormwater?
Stormwater runoff is any water, either through rain, sprinklers, or irrigation of yards/gardens, that falls and is transported over land and pavement into local waterbodies through the storm drain system. Any water that flows into a storm drain is deposited into local creeks, rivers, grasslands, and sloughs without treatment.

What is the difference between Storm Drainage Systems and Sanitary Sewer Systems?
Stormwater and all the pollutants that flow from our homes and yards, parking lots and streets to the gutter into the storm drains, flow directly into our local water bodies, untreated. Sanitary sewer systems collect wastewater from indoor plumbing such as sinks, toilets, washing machines, and floor drains and it is transported through underground pipes to a wastewater treatment facility where pollutants are removed from the wastewater before it is discharged.

What is a watershed and how do I affect it?
A watershed is an area of land that catches and drains water into grasslands, sloughs, streams, or rivers via direct runoff or smaller tributaries and eventually ends up in a large body of water such as the San Joaquin River. As stormwater flows over land and across the watershed into the grasslands and sloughs, it carries polluted urban runoff such as used motor oil and grease, pesticides, trash and other harmful debris. This is where the public comes in. The more we can prevent polluting the watershed, the healthier our waterways will be and the habitat it supports.

What is an Illicit Discharge?
The discharge of pollutants or non-stormwater materials to storm sewer systems via overland flow or direct dumping of materials into a catch basin is an illicit or illegal discharge. Some examples of illicit discharges include washing paint, or dumping used motor oil in or around a storm drain. Dumping of automotive fluids, washwaters, construction materials, sediment and/or silt, and food wastes into a storm drain are also illegal. To report an illicit discharge incident contact the Public Works Department at 209-827-7056. **Note:** If you are reporting an emergency situation that could result in imminent or substantial danger to the health and safety of persons, **call 911**.

What is E-waste?
E-waste (electronic waste) is a term for electronic products nearing the end of their "useful life." Products such as computers, computer monitors, televisions, VCRs, stereos, microwaves, and fax machines are common electronic goods. Many of these products can be reused or recycled. Unfortunately, electronic discards are one of the fastest growing segments of our nation's waste stream. When we improperly dispose of e-waste, the mercury or the lead from the cathode ray tubes leaches into surface and groundwater. Computer monitors and televisions are banned from disposal in landfills due to the high amounts of lead that they contain.

How do I properly dispose of E-waste?
The City of Los Banos has a Clean-up Day in the Spring and in the Fall. You can find dates and locations on our website: http://www.losbanos.org/solid_waste_and_recycling/

Acceptable materials include items that won't fit in your trash cart as well as TVs, computers and computer parts, and tires (maximum of 9 and no rims or tractor tires). A charity organization will be on hand to pick up reusable items such as furniture, clothing, toys, books and clothes. *Household hazardous waste such as paint, solvent, paint thinners, automotive fluids, household batteries and fluorescent light bulbs and medical waste such as sharps (needles, syringes) and old medicines are not accepted*.

Merced County has Hazardous Waste recycling events every quarter. Visit the Merced Recycles website for dates, locations and more information.

For other hazardous waste questions, please contact a Merced County Household Hazardous Waste Facility near you:

Billy Wright Landfill	Highway 59 Landfill
17173 S. Billy Wright Rd	6040 N. Highway 59
Los Banos	Merced
209-826-1163	209-723-4481

Why should I recycle used motor oil & filters?
Recycling the motor oil from your car, truck, motorcycle, boat, RV or lawnmower is one way that you can demonstrate your commitment to protect the environment for future generations while conserving energy resources. Used motor oil contains heavy metals and other harmful contaminates that negatively impact the environment. Recycled motor oil can be re-refined into a base for lubricating oil or burned as fuel.

Los Banos offers curbside used oil recycling collection. Motor oil can be recycled in a container with a tight fitting screw on lid only. Containers must not be larger than 2 gallons in size. You may put 2 gallons of motor oil out near your blue recycle cart on your regular service day. Used oil filters are accepted and must be placed inside a locking Ziploc type of plastic bag.

Up to five gallons of oil and used oil filters can be recycled free at the following locations:

Walmart	NAPA Auto Parts
1575 W. Pacheco Blvd.	1560 E. Pacheco Blvd.
209-826-8050	209-826-5174
AutoZone	O'Reilly Auto Parts
665 Pacheco Blvd.	30 W. Pacheco Blvd.
209-826-6046	209-826-0318

Please check with the businesses listed here to dispose of other fluids. Many accept transmission fluid.

There's oil in the street in front of my house. What should I do about it?
If you can't determine who is responsible for the pollution, sprinkle it with kitty litter, sweep up the soiled absorbent and place it in a household hazardous waste container for disposal at

a [hazardous waste collection event](#) near you.

Can I drain my pool into the storm drain?
Only if the water is dechlorinated and has never been treated with copper-based algaecides.

Leaves and yard clippings are organic. Why can't I put them down the storm drain?
When organic and/or yard waste decays in water, the "breakdown" process removes oxygen from the water that is necessary for the health of all aquatic species from microorganisms to fish. Essentially, it robs the aquatic life of oxygen and suffocates them. Yard debris can be recycled through curbside collection (green can), or can be composted at home to help your garden.

If I can't dump left over chemicals into the sanitary sewer, what can I do with them?
Take them to a local household [hazardous waste collection event](#).

Why shouldn't I wash my car at home, I use biodegradable soap?
When washing cars, the water runoff can enter the storm drains. This puts pollutants such as grease, dirt, oil, metals and soap to our local creeks. Even biodegradable soaps require oxygen to breakdown, depleting our creek of the oxygen fish, and other organisms, need to survive. Also, just because the soap breaks down, doesn't mean it breaks down into components that should be in the water. It is best to take your car to a car wash where the water is discharged to the sanitary sewer system or wash your car on a lawn or other surface where the water can be drained down and filtered through the soil.

It's ok to rinse my paint supplies out in the gutter, right?
No. Read the paint can label; if it is "latex" or water based paint, you can wash the paint equipment in a sink that is plumbed to sanitary sewer. Any sink in your house should do. Dispose of leftover latex paints at a [hazardous waste collection event](#) event or take it to one of the free [drop off locations](#).

If it is an "oil based" paint do not wash equipment in the sink!
Oil based paint equipment can be cleaned using solvents and thinners. Dispose of oil based paints, solvents and thinners at a [hazardous waste collection event](#) event or take it to one of the free [drop off locations](#).

What am I supposed to do with my dirty mop water; I don't want to dump it in my clean sink.
If something is too dirty or "gross" for you to want to dump it in a sink in your home, it is definitely not acceptable for the storm drain. The water should go into the sink or pour it into your house's sewer clean out. Remember, only rain down the storm drain!