



Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy Factsheet

About Urban Stormwater Infiltration

When it rains in urban environments, impervious surfaces like sidewalks, parking lots, and streets prevent stormwater from infiltrating into the soil. Stormwater can transport pollutants like trash, fertilizers, pesticides, and oil and grease from roadways. When this urban stormwater flows directly into streams, rivers, and lakes, the pollutants can harm native fish, insects, plants, and amphibians that live in freshwater habitats.



Figure 1: Rain runs off the city streets and into a storm drain, which drains into a nearby pond. The pond provides habitat for local wildlife and enables the stormwater to infiltrate into the ground and recharge the groundwater.

Infiltration projects allow stormwater to flow into the ground instead of streams and lakes. Infiltrating stormwater is preferable because natural processes in the soil help remove pollutants as stormwater infiltrates. Examples of stormwater infiltration systems include rain gardens, permeable pavement, and stormwater retention ponds. There are many benefits to infiltration, including increased green spaces, community recreational opportunities, habitat restoration, and replenished groundwater supplies. However, some agencies are hesitant to install infiltration projects because of the risk of degrading the quality of drinking water aquifers.



About the Project

The State Water Resources Control Board's stormwater planning unit is developing a proposed statewide policy for urban stormwater infiltration. This proposed policy, known as the Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy, aims to benefit urban areas by encouraging responsible stormwater infiltration to protect water quality in rivers, lakes, and streams. The proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy will include a risk-based framework to clarify when and where it is safe to implement a stormwater infiltration system.

Project Benefits

The anticipated benefits of the proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy include:

- Increasing groundwater supply,
- Developing science-based guidance on urban stormwater infiltration best practices,
- Protecting groundwater quality and beneficial uses,
- Protecting surface water quality through infiltration of stormwater runoff that would otherwise flow into streams, rivers, and lakes,
- Addressing regulatory inconsistencies in current permits and local ordinances that create confusion about where, when, and how to implement stormwater infiltration projects, and
- Providing multiple benefits associated with urban stormwater infiltration projects to communities.

Protecting Groundwater Quality

Protecting groundwater quality is important because urban residents throughout California depend on groundwater supplies for their drinking water. Fortunately, as stormwater infiltrates, natural processes in the soil help remove pollutants. To make sure there is enough soil to remove pollutants, the proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy will set a minimum vertical distance between the bottom of the infiltration system and groundwater; and will also set minimum distances between infiltration systems and drinking water wells, septic tanks, and contaminated sites to protect drinking water quality. Pretreatment systems will also be required when necessary to protect groundwater quality.



Figure 2 Figure showing a house with a septic system and domestic well on one side of the property. The infiltration system is on the other side of the house from the septic system and domestic well, at a safe distance from both.

Risk-Based Approach to Infiltration

The proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy will also define risk categories for common land use types, and will encourage infiltration for locations with low-risk land use types, like residential areas, to help replenish groundwater supplies. In areas with medium-risk land use types, such as commercial areas or strip malls, the proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy may require pretreatment or other measures to ensure the stormwater is safe to infiltrate. The proposed Urban Stormwater Infiltration Policy will prohibit infiltration systems in some high-risk cases such as locations with certain industrial activities, contaminated soil, or with existing groundwater contamination.

More information

More information on this Proposed Policy can be found here or by scanning the QR code below:

Stormwater Infiltration Policy

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/storms/projects/urban_stormwater_infiltration_policy.html

Bitly:

<https://rb.gy/fjoc7m>

To receive future updates on this project, please subscribe to the Storm Water Planning email subscription list on the [State Water Resources Control Board's email subscription list website](#). To subscribe:

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Questions? Reach out to Kelly Rodman at kelly.rodman@waterboards.ca.gov or email the STORMS team at STORMS@waterboards.ca.gov



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