

# CHELAN COUNTY COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STORMWATER PROGRAM AND UTILITY

2/28/08

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**1. How much is the stormwater charge?**

The rate is \$5.50 per month for a single family home in the proposed service area of unincorporated Chelan County with the final rate to be set by the Board of Commissioners. Non-single family parcels (multi-family/commercial/industrial) will pay a multiple of this base charge depending on the measured amount of impervious area on their property.

**2. What is the service charge based on?**

The service charge is based on the amount of impervious area within a property. Impervious area is the best indicator of how much you use the stormwater system. Single-family homes provide the basis for the rate in that the average amount of impervious area on a single-family residence within our service area was measured as 4,600 square feet or 1 equivalent residential unit (ERU). All non single-family parcels pay a multiple of this base rate according to their measured impervious area.

**3. What is impervious surface?**

When property is improved through buildings, pavement, trafficked gravel/soil, patios and artificial turf, water is prevented or retarded from getting into the soil. These areas are termed impervious surfaces because they restrict natural infiltration and increase runoff from the property.

**4. Who has to pay?**

All developed property within the County's proposed service area will pay the stormwater service fee. That includes houses, schools, public facilities, churches and businesses. The only exceptions are streets within the County's proposed service area and within planned residential developments. These areas are excluded because they are designed to collect and carry stormwater runoff. The proposed service area includes all parcels within the Urban Growth Area (UGA) and will also include those areas within Sunnyslope and the Port's property within Olds Station. The City of Wenatchee's service area within the UGA will be excluded from the County's proposed utility boundaries.

**5. Is there a review process for this service charge?**

Yes. It will include a review of the accuracy of the County's measurements or the calculation of the service fee for non-residential customers.

**6. How is property measured?**

Impervious area on non-residential properties was measured from recent (June '06) satellite photos with the actual measurement done via computer imaging. This produces a high degree of accuracy.

**7. How much money will this service fee raise?**

Approximately \$343,000 will be raised by this service fee. This amount reflects a more aggressive capital program aimed at building neighborhood improvements quicker. In addition to capital, this program will fund a very basic service level in maintenance, development review, utility administrative services, field inspection, and regulatory compliance.

**8. Why are churches and schools being billed?**

The service charge, just like water and sewer fees, is based upon the cost of services provided. Because this is not a tax, it is collected from all customers who receive service. Churches and schools contribute a significant amount of runoff to the County because of their size and amount of hard surface. They will be treated like all other customers under the rate structure.

**9. Is this stormwater charge deductible on my income tax?**

For residential customers, this is a service fee and not a tax. It cannot be deducted from your income tax. For non-single family property owners, the charge may be considered a cost of doing business by the IRS depending on your specific tax situation.

**10. How can you impose this fee without a vote?**

This is not a tax but a user fee. The Chelan County Board of Commissioners has been involved with reviewing a number of options for funding stormwater management. We have also worked directly with the Stormwater Utility Program Development Project Citizens Task Force to discuss the fee and program.

**11. I am a renter, do I pay the fee or does the landlord?**

Under most conditions, the bill will go to the property owner of record.

**12. I have a retail store in a shopping center and currently receive a water bill. Will I get the stormwater bill as well?**

All impervious area within a multi-tenant facility such as a shopping center or apartment is consolidated into one bill. The bill will be sent to the person responsible for the improvements or management association.

**13. What happens if I don't pay?**

We have an excellent payment history with most of our customers and have been able to help them remain current with their bills. Unpaid bills will be referred for follow up action.

**14. Where does the money go?**

Some of the important components of this program include:

a) increased maintenance of the County's stormwater system, b) development of stormwater design standards and regulations c) field inspection/enforcement of these standards d) public information and education e) construction of long overdue capital facilities f) water quality regulatory compliance.

**15. Isn't there already a fund for stormwater or drainage?**

Money from the County's Road Fund has provided some funding. This is very limited and not always available. By law the gas tax revenues that supply this Fund must be spent on improvements within the road right of way or on improvements directly related to protecting the integrity of the road system. So support for stormwater is not the primary aim of this gas tax revenue.

**16. Why not charge a property tax or better still, turn the program over to the State of Washington?**

Property taxes are based upon the assessed valuation of land and their improvements. These values have little relationship to an individual property's use of the storm drainage system. A service fee, applied to all parcels, is a more equitable method of funding the program. Many tax-exempt properties, such as schools and churches, are large contributors to the stormwater runoff problem. They will pay their share of the utility fee.

**17. Has this program been used anywhere else?**

Yes. Large and small communities throughout the nation have adopted stormwater control programs and applied user fees. Douglas County, East Wenatchee and Wenatchee have implemented stormwater utilities and fees along with many other communities in Central/Eastern Washington including Spokane County, Spokane, Yakima, Ellensburg, Yakima County, and Walla Walla.

**18. Is this a one-time charge?**

It is an ongoing annual service charge for the development of a stormwater maintenance program, operations, facilities, and water quality compliance.

**19. How can I get help with a neighborhood stormwater problem?**

Give us a call at 509.667.6415 and we will be happy to see what can be done.

**20. Why should I have to pay? I have a small house with large lawn and live at the top of a hill.**

You might not have a problem, but the runoff generated from your property contributes to the overall problem. Fertilizer from your lawn adds phosphates, a key pollutant carried in stormwater. Eventually, everybody will share in the program through an improved environment, better access to roads during storm events and reduced flooding during abnormal years. You also use and expect the county road systems to be safe and reliable; see Question #15.

**21. Isn't this money just going to take care of the drainage problems created by new development in Chelan County?**

No. Every developer in Chelan County is required to provide the drainage improvements necessary to handle the runoff generated by that development. These improvements are not funded by the County and WILL NOT be funded by stormwater service charges. The facilities are totally funded by the developer. All impervious area created by these new developments will be included within the stormwater utility and will pay the service fee just as everyone else in the County's proposed service area. For these fees, they will receive stormwater services just as everyone else in the County's proposed service area.

**22. Why just one flat rate for residential properties?**

Most residences are very similar in their impervious areas. In most cities and counties, 95% of the homes are clustered very closely in terms of impervious area in order to apply a second tier for larger homes we would have to measure all the homes in the proposed service area. This would have been expensive and not gain us much in terms of fairness.

**23. I have put in stormwater management facilities on my development. Shouldn't this be reflected in a reduced charge?**

There are credits available for non-single family residences and Home Owners Associations providing water quantity and quality facilities. The County has established a service charge reduction for those having qualifying facilities on-site. Depending on the design of the facility, this may be eligible for a credit. Credit application forms are available from the County by calling 509.667.6415 or on the website.

**24. My home/business is not connected to the County's drainage system. Therefore, why should I have to pay?**

Your property may not be physically connected to the drainage system in the same manner as water or sewer but you and your property are still provided service. How? The County's stormwater program improves and maintains those upstream stormwater facilities that protect your property; they establish design criteria/regulate development that helps control off site stormwater problems; the program is taking steps to reduce stormwater pollutants that impact the Columbia or Wenatchee Rivers. Every developed property in Chelan County's proposed service area is served by these activities.

**25. What is the concern about stormwater quality?**

Stormwater quality = "nonpoint source pollution". As the name implies, nonpoint source pollution comes from numerous locations and is carried through runoff to the Columbia or Wenatchee Rivers. The County has been issued a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater permit which establishes what the County needs to do in order to comply with this Federal Clean Water Act law. The types of pollutants include toxins, metals, oils, nutrients and fecal coliform. These directly impact water quality and now represent a large percentage of the pollution picture.

**26. How can I be sure this money won't pay for other County projects?**

Under law, stormwater fees may not exceed the cost of providing stormwater improvements and services. Your fees will go into an "enterprise" or special fund which will be used only to pay for the stormwater program.

**27. How will you decide which stormwater projects/improvements get done first?**

One of the initial actions of the stormwater utility will be to inventory all the existing drainage system needs and develop an overall improvement plan. This plan will prioritize existing needs based on both stormwater quantity and quality considerations.

**28. I don't want my dollars going to pay for projects that will benefit areas outside my neighborhood.**

The County has an obligation to address the most critical problems first but within the proposed service area. All subbasins within the proposed service area of the County will eventually require stormwater improvements or services.

**29. Will this money attract grants and other money; for example, for State and Federal projects?**

Yes, we expect to be more competitive for any funds which become available, especially those related to stormwater quality where County service charge revenues may be required as collateral or the means to repay federal or state loans.

**30. My property is located where there are no identified problems, so why do I have to pay the same as locations with problems?**

We are asking you to pay your fair share for improving a system of storm drainage that benefits everyone. The fact that improving the overall drainage system may have more direct benefits to some is inevitable but does not impact the fairness of the rate or the fact that we are all in this utility together for overall stormwater management and improved water quality.

**31. I retain stormwater on-site, therefore why do I pay?**

First, if you are not a single family residence and you exceed the County's design standards for on-site stormwater storage you may be eligible for a credit against the service charge. Second, retaining all stormwater on-site is virtually impossible due to infiltration and the amount of storage required for larger storm events. While you may reduce your downstream impacts by your on-site system, you do not eliminate them so those properties will pay for their contribution of runoff.

**32. What will happen to our private system?**

They will be operated and maintained as they are now, by the private property owner(s) or by the homeowners association. However, the county will/may require a certification that the facility is being operated and maintained on a regular basis, and the County may need to inspect the private facility as necessary. This is particularly the case with stormwater detention facilities within subdivisions where downstream properties rely on the operation and maintenance of these facilities.

**33. How often do I pay?**

You will have the option of paying the stormwater charge as a single annual payment or you can pay ½ the bill semiannually.

**34. How is this different than a taxing district?**

This stormwater utility (similar to water and sewer utilities) is established under RCW 36.89 and is distinct from a taxing district. The rate is based on a fee for services provided and not based on the assessed value of the property.

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If you have other questions or concerns regarding Chelan County's stormwater program, we encourage you to call the Public Works Department at 509.667.6415.