

Name that drain!

By Carlene Brown

As we enter the fall season, we begin to see water washing over roofs, streets, driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, and land surfaces, and it can pick up a variety of pollutants, such as oil, pesticides, chemicals, soil, and leaves. This polluted storm water drains into the storm system that eventually clogs our drains and discharges into our rivers and streams. These pollutants can endanger the water quality of our waterways, making them unhealthy for people, fish, and wildlife.

Unfortunately, many people mistakenly believe the drains connect directly to the sewage-treatment plant and use them to dispose of harmful substances like used motor oil. In an effort to change that harmful behavior, some cities have come up with creative ways to draw attention to these drains.

Some members have found that one way to help minimize clogged drains is to establish an Adopt-a-Storm Drain program. Similar to Adopt-a-Street or Park, Adopt-a-Storm Drain is a program where a community has organized groups of volunteers to inspect and clear storm drains throughout the year, which assists the member with maintenance. Given the challenges many members are facing at this time with reduced staffing, this is one way to get some help in keeping the drains clear.

In some cities and towns, citizens are taking it a step further and being allowed to name their drain. “You’re So Drain,” “Purple Drain,” and “Name that Drain!” are just a few comical nicknames people have used as part of the volunteer adopt-a-drain program.

Members who are interested in developing an Adopt-a-Storm Drain program should consider the following risk management recommendations:

1. Develop a policy outlining the expectations, rules, and guidelines of the program.
2. Provide an application for citizens to complete online. The application should ask for the participant’s name and contact information, the location of the drain(s) they want to adopt and a liability release with language to confirm in writing that they have read, understood and will abide by the program rules and guidelines.
3. All volunteers should be required to log their volunteer time and this documentation should be submitted to the member so the hours can be reported to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries.
4. While this program won’t eliminate a member’s duty to maintain its storm drains, it can help reduce the risk of claims associated with blocked drains and pollutants going into the drains.

If you have questions or would like further assistance, please contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative.