

Navigating the autumn chill

By Kim Dennis

The leaves are changing from green to orange, the nights are becoming chilly, and the cool wind carries the scent of pumpkin patches and forest floors. There is no doubt about it, autumn is just around the corner, and it is time to begin preparing for the fall season.

While the transition from summer into autumn may seem mild compared to the shifting into other seasons, it presents unique challenges and risks.

One of the main concerns during this time of year is the increased likelihood of severe weather events, including heavy rainfall and high winds potentially compromising your storm drain system, and leading to falling trees.

Storm Drains

Storm water drains are designed to capture and convey displaced storm water from surfaces such as streets and parking lots, transporting the water downstream while filtering out sediment and pollutants.

During heavy rain, drains can become clogged and experience ponding. Ponding is when rainfall exceeds the storm drain's capacity and streets can temporarily fill up with water. When the drainage process is disrupted, it can lead to flooding, seepage into buildings, and auto accidents.

How can members prevent drains from clogging and potential third-party claims? Have a regular inspection and maintenance program in place to include:

- Inspection of all system components such as curbs and gutters, catch basins, culverts, grates, vegetated channels, underground pipes, and inlet and outlet equipment for retention/detention ponds.
- Removal of all trash and debris.
- Sediment control.
- Stabilization of erosion.
- Vegetation management to include mowing, planting beneficial vegetation, and removal of invasive growth (using mechanical methods of vegetation removal rather than applying herbicides).
- Hydro jetting and vactoring.
- Documentation and retention of all inspection, maintenance, and restorative operations.

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.

Trees

After a storm, members may be contacted about member-owned trees that have fallen into private property. A member may consider removing debris from private property as a service or good neighbor act. During the removal of the tree debris, a member could cause subsequent damage to the private property owner's land, fence, or home, thus creating liability where there previously was none. For this reason, WCIA strongly recommends that our members transfer the risk by contracting with a reputable tree service for removal of debris, especially when it is resting against structures such as buildings and fences, or it involves entering private property. A member who chooses to have employees perform debris removal from private property should only do so after obtaining a signed release and hold harmless agreement from the property owner. For assistance with reviewing a release, please contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative. For further information on tree management see WCIA Liability Resource Manual Guideline [PAR 18. Municipal Tree Management](#).

For more information regarding storm water management or municipal tree management, contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative.