

Creative solutions to enhance storm water maintenance

By Drew Brien

The Farmers' Almanac is calling for a cooler, wetter winter across Washington State this year. That means more rain and more chances for storm drains to get clogged with leaves, branches, trash, and other debris. When drains are blocked, water cannot flow properly, leading to flooding on streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces. These localized floods can disrupt daily life, and damage infrastructure and private property.

But here is the good news: there is a simple way your community members can help.

Introducing the Adopt-a-Storm Drain Program

Much like Adopt-a-Park or Adopt-a-Street, this volunteer initiative invites residents, families, businesses, and community groups to “adopt” nearby storm drains. By regularly checking and clearing designated storm drains, especially during the rainy fall and winter months, they will help prevent flooding and protect their neighborhoods.

It is a small act that makes a big difference.

Why It Matters

When community members pitch in, cities can stretch their resources further, improve stormwater management, and build stronger connections with residents. It is also a great way to show pride in their neighborhood and care for the environment. While this program does not replace a city's legal responsibility to maintain stormwater systems, it is a valuable supplement that helps reduce flooding risks and potential liability.

Thinking About Starting a Program? Here Are Some Tips:

1. Set Clear Guidelines

Create a written policy that explains how the program works, what volunteers are expected to do, and how to sign up. Make sure to include safety tips and emphasize that participation is voluntary and meant to support public infrastructure.

2. Use a Volunteer Application

Ask participants to fill out a form with:

- Their name and contact information
- The location of the drain(s) they want to adopt
- A liability release/waiver and acknowledgment of program guidelines

3. **Provide the Right Tools**

Equip volunteers with basic gear to stay safe and effective:

- Reflective vest
- Rubber gloves
- Trash grabber or rake
- Bucket or garbage bag

4. **Track Volunteer Hours**

Have volunteers log their hours and submit them to your agency. These hours can be reported to the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries for workers' compensation coverage in case of injury.

Ultimately, cities are responsible for maintaining stormwater systems, but with community support, those efforts go even further. If your agency is interested in launching an Adopt-a-Storm Drain program, contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative for further considerations.

Resources are available in the WCIA Liability Resource Manual:

1. [PER.03-Adopt-a-Street or Park](#)
2. [PER03.01-Sample-Adopt-a-Street-Park Agreement](#)
3. [PER03.02-Sample-Adopt-a-Street-Park Release Waiver Hold Harmless](#)