

Stormy Weather Ahead? Feeling Drained? Just Reach Out!

By Debbi Sellers

Many WCIA members have Adopt-a-Park or Street programs, but how many members have developed an Adopt-a-Storm Drain program?

As summer turns into fall, the weather becomes cooler and there is an increase in the number of windy, rainy days. As a result of this stormy weather, storm drains become clogged, leading to urban flooding. 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 citizens volunteer to inspect and clear storm drains throughout the year, which assists the member with maintenance. 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.

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 details, rules & guidelines of the program, including how citizens can sign up and what will be expected of them. Clearly state that this is a volunteer-based opportunity for residents to help care for the utility infrastructure. Members should also include any safety precautions that participants need to consider.
2. Provide an application for citizens to complete. The application should ask for the participant's name and contact information, the location of the drain(s) they want to adopt, liability release, assumption of the risk and hold harmless language and a requirement to confirm in writing that they have read, understood and will abide by the program guidelines and rules.
3. Volunteers should be provided with all tools and equipment necessary to safely inspect, clean and maintain the storm drains that they have adopted. This equipment should include, but not be limited to a reflective safety vest, rubber gloves, grabber, rake or tool to use in picking up trash/debris and a bucket or garbage bag to place debris into.
4. All volunteers should be required to log the amount of time spent volunteering. This documentation should be submitted to the member so the hours can be reported to Washington State Department of Labor and Industries.

If you have questions or would like further assistance in developing an Adopt-a-Storm Drain program, please contact your WCIA Risk Management Representative.