

When it drains it pours

By Lisa Knapton

Fall has arrived and in Washington this means an increase in precipitation and a never-ending supply of falling leaves, potentially compromising the effective operation of member storm water systems. Storm water systems are designed to capture and convey displaced storm water from impervious surfaces such as streets and parking lots, transporting the water downstream while filtering out sediment and pollutants.

A system that is not properly maintained will fail in time, when debris and silt build up causing structural components to become obstructed. If the drainage process is disrupted, it can lead to potential flooding causing severe damage including, but not limited to, erosion of the surrounding area, seepage into buildings allowing for dangerous mold growth, automobile accidents due to water over the roadway, and pollution of nearby streams, rivers, and lakes.

By performing preventative maintenance, members can avoid costly system repairs and third-party claims. A regular inspection and maintenance program will ensure proper functioning of the system and extend its lifespan. Regular maintenance should include but not be limited to:

- 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 contract the maintenance of their storm water systems to independent contractors. If so, members should require copies of all inspections, including any video footage as well as routine reports documenting maintenance and/or repairs performed by the contractor. Members should also have a written contract requiring the correct types and amounts of liability insurance and indemnification language that adequately insulates them from damage claims due to negligence caused by the contractor.

For further assistance, please contact your assigned WCIA Risk Management Representative.