



**PROJECT GROUNDWORK**  
your pipeline to clean water

# How Can I Get Involved?

As part of Project Groundwork, the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSD) is currently evaluating sewer improvements to reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) in Hamilton County. So, how can you help? There are numerous ways you can assist in improving water quality and keeping stormwater out of the sewer system.

## What's the Challenge?

When it rains, raw sewage — mixed with stormwater — overflows from our sewers into local rivers and streams and can also back up into basements.

The vast majority of overflows occur from combined sewers, which carry both sewage and stormwater in the same pipe. The overflows occur when the pipes are filled beyond their capacity. Hamilton County is among the top five urban locations in the U.S. for combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

## What's the Solution?

To resolve this public health and environmental issue, MSD has embarked on the largest public works project in the history of our community to rebuild and improve our sewer system. Called **Project Groundwork**, this multi-year and multi-billion dollar initiative includes hundreds of sewer improvements and stormwater control projects.

## How Can I Help?

You can make a big difference by making informed choices concerning our sewer system, by ensuring that your private sewer line is maintained properly and by incorporating sustainable stormwater control practices into your daily life.

### Help Keep Sewers Healthy

Keep sewers healthy and free from clogs and backups by being mindful of materials that may cause problems if flushed, poured down the drain or dumped directly into a sewer or stormwater inlet.

- Properly dispose of household hazardous waste like cleaning products, motor oil, paints and insecticides/herbicides, etc. through Hamilton County's household hazardous waste dropoff program: <http://www.hamiltoncountyrecycles.org/index.php?page=hhw-drop-off-program>.
- Do not flush or dump trash into the sewer system.
- Flush pet waste from your yard down the toilet or dispose of it in the garbage.
- Do not flush disposable wipes down your toilet. Put them in your trash instead.
- Avoid washing grease, oil and fats, including cooking oils, down your sink and floor drains. Dispose of them in your trash. Over time, fats, oils and greases (known as FOG) can build up in drains and sewers and eventually create clogs. Clogged sewers can result in sewer backups into your home or into local rivers and streams.

### Maintain Your Private Sewer Line

Your private sewer line, also known as a building sewer, is the underground sewer pipe that connects your plumbing to the public sewer system. Property owners are responsible for maintaining and repairing building sewers. Help keep your building sewer in good working condition by:

- Avoiding planting trees, shrubs and bushes on your property near the sewer line. Roots can enter, block and damage sewer pipes.
- Keeping your gutters clean to avoid leaves, twigs and debris from entering downspouts, which are sometimes tied directly into building sewer pipes.
- Having a professional inspect and clean your building sewer annually.

### Use Sustainable Stormwater Controls

Sustainable stormwater controls help reduce the volume of stormwater entering the combined sewer system. Examples include:

- **Rain barrels or cisterns** — items that collect rainwater before it reaches the ground. Collected rainwater can then be used for other purposes, such as watering gardens or washing cars. If you live in the City of Cincinnati, rain barrels must have an overflow device that connects back into the plumbing stack (where the downspout goes into the ground).  
*Note: See back page for rules and regulations of downspouts and rain barrels for Hamilton County.*
- **Rain gardens** — a planned depressed, vegetated area that captures and absorbs runoff from nearby impervious surfaces
- **Green or vegetative roofs** — roofs which incorporate vegetative materials that uptake and filter stormwater before it flows into a roof drain system
- **Pervious paving and pavers** — materials used as alternatives to concrete or asphalt that allow water to pass to the ground or subsurface storage below
- **Water conservation** — cutting down on shower times, turning water off when washing dishes or brushing teeth and periodically checking for small leaks in your household pipes can significantly reduce water use and cut down on bills.

## Be Proactive in Your Community

There are several ways to be proactive to help make our local waterways cleaner and healthier. Consider the following:

1. **Join a watershed group** - there are several local groups that you can get involved with; visit their websites to learn more:
  - Green Umbrella: <http://greenumbrella.org/>
  - Mill Creek Restoration Project: [www.millcreekrestoration.org/](http://www.millcreekrestoration.org/)
  - Mill Creek Watershed Council of Communities: [www.millcreekwatershed.org/](http://www.millcreekwatershed.org/)
  - Rain Garden Alliance: <http://raingardenalliance.org/>

2. **Report water quality issues** - Make your local community councils, township trustees, village councils or city councils aware of any water quality issues that you know of.
3. **Label stormwater drains** - Visit the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District's web site at [www.hcswcd.org](http://www.hcswcd.org) or call 513-772-7645 to get information on how to label stormwater drains and how to spread information on keeping stormwater drains clean in your neighborhood.
4. **Walk along a stream or greenway trail** - Enjoy and appreciate the local recreational trails and waterways.

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## Rule and Regulations for Downspout Disconnection, Rain Collection Systems and Rainwater Harvesting

### Downspout Disconnection

During a heavy storm, each downspout on your house can deliver up to 12 gallons of rainwater a minute to the sewer system.

Large amounts of water entering the system from downspouts can contribute to basement backups and enormous amounts of water flowing into the sewer system, causing sewer overflows.

By simply disconnecting a downspout and allowing the water to flow into your yard, rain barrel or rain garden, you can make a difference in keeping excess water out of the sewer system.

### City of Cincinnati Downspout Regulations

Currently, City of Cincinnati property owners may not disconnect their downspouts from the sewer system. However, property owners are allowed to install an outdoor rain barrel or cistern as long as it does not connect to any internal plumbing system and also must have an overflow pipe that connects back into the sewer system. The collected rain water inside the rain barrel or cistern can only be used for outdoor irrigation purposes.

City of Cincinnati property owners are also prohibited from disconnecting their downspouts and diverting the rain water directly to the yard or street.

The City of Cincinnati Stormwater Management Utility (SMU) and several other City of Cincinnati departments are working with MSD in a process of amending the City of Cincinnati Ordinances to allow downspout disconnection when it can be proven that it will not cause or contribute to a public nuisance or hazard.

This process is expected to be resolved by spring 2012.

### Hamilton County Storm Water District

Hamilton County Storm Water District is the Regulating Authority for unincorporated Townships and selected Municipalities in Hamilton County. Property owners under the Hamilton County Storm Water District are currently allowed to disconnect downspouts under approved conditions to the yard, rain barrels and rain gardens.

Developers are advised that when downspouts are discharged to the rear (or side) of a proposed lot, flow should not be directed toward another building or to a subdivision lot where a building is likely to be constructed, which would create stormwater problems for such building.

The review and approval of plans for downspout outlets or the issuance of permits can be obtained from the office of the Hamilton County Engineer and the office of the Plumbing Division or the Hamilton County Board of Health.

For more information please visit:

[http://www.hamilton-co.org/pubworks/downspout\\_regulations.asp](http://www.hamilton-co.org/pubworks/downspout_regulations.asp)

### Other Municipalities and Jurisdictions

Check with your local Township or Municipality Public Works Office for more information regarding rules and regulations for downspout disconnection, rain barrels and cisterns and rain water harvesting at your location.

### Need More Information?

For more information contact:

**MSD Engineering Customer Service Line**

at **(513) 557-3594**

or **[MSD.Communications@cincinnati-oh.gov](mailto:MSD.Communications@cincinnati-oh.gov)**