

## Eye on the environment: Rain faces a hazardous journey

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A "raindrop's journey" sounds like the smallest slide in the kiddie section of the water park, but it is much more hazardous than that.

It's an adventure so dramatic it could be a three-movie deal. Imagine the shock in the second installment when the high-flying cirrus cloud learns the deep and turbulent ocean is actually his father.

The studios might pass on that script, but there is enough adventure there for a Playstation game.

In this game, your mission is to drop from the sky onto a watershed, then follow the path of gravity until you have joined forces with millions of others at the nearest rendezvous point. Unfortunately, unthinking residents have left big problems for a small raindrop.

If you are lucky enough to avoid concrete and asphalt, it could be a quick trip underground. If not, the hazards will be many before the rendezvous at a stream or the ocean.

To get to the ocean cleanly, raindrops have to thread through parking lots and streets, avoiding all sources of pollution in the watershed or it's game over.

Player one, ready? Start.

Falling quickly into the neighborhood it's an easy drop onto a driveway. You gather yourself and head to the gutter. But wait, what's floating on your back, an oil sheen?

Game over. Oil and other fluids that leak from cars cause pollution when washed away.

Player two, your turn. Dropping into the same neighborhood, the wind pushes you against the garage, down the wall and into a soggy box of snail bait.

Game over. All household chemicals, especially pesticides, need to be stored indoors.

Player one, try again. Down, down, down and strait into an open trash can. No way to stay clean through the trash. If the lid was down, you would have had a chance.

Player two, last chance. After a soft landing on the lawn, it looks like you'll make it. But the lawn was heavily watered the day before and is now soaked. No way underground, the only option is to cross it. It's slow going and there's too much fertilizer to avoid. And what's that? Pet waste? No game over, you quit.

Rain can't control the pollutants it picks up, but we can. With an eye on the environment, we can make it as simple as possible for rain to reach streams and the ocean without being polluted.

Our roofs, driveways and yards send rain to a storm-drain system designed to protect life and property by preventing flooding. This is separate from indoor drains, like a kitchen sink, which go to a wastewater treatment plant (that's a video game nobody wants to play). Storm water is not cleaned and processed like waste water and needs our protection to stay clean.

The game we just played had the difficulty setting on "expert," but it shouldn't be that hard for real raindrops. By practicing good housekeeping and following these tips, we can make it easy for all raindrops to cleanly reach their rendezvous point:

- Store all chemicals safely indoors. Read and follow directions and don't over-apply or use them before a predicted storm.
- Pick up after pets. Your pets don't belong in the wild and neither does their waste.
- Maintain your car and keep it free of leaks.
- Keep trash cans covered, not just to protect the rain but also to prevent curious animals from spreading trash around.
- Protect stockpiles of dirt, compost or manure from washing away.
- Water only plants, not concrete, and don't water or fertilize before predicted rain.



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