

**Include Watershed Protection in Your Home Improvement Plans**

By Arne Anselm

You've approved the drawing, planned for storage, determined a budget, negotiated the contract and set a timeline for your upcoming home improvement project, but have you considered potential impacts on the environment? Construction activities can be a threat to our watersheds. Trash, metals, solvents, as well as pesticides, nutrients and green waste from landscaping activities all are considered pollutants and can create many problems when washed from work sites and into storm drains. Whether you are doing the project yourself or hiring a contractor, you are ultimately responsible for complying with storm water regulations to keep Ventura County's watersheds clean.

How do pollutants get into a watershed? In Ventura County, the water runoff from neighborhoods enters the storm drain system and joins the natural flows in one of our four major watersheds (Ventura River, Santa Clara River, Calleguas Creek, or Malibu Creek), all of which empty into the Pacific Ocean. It is important to realize that none of this water goes through a filtering or treatment process, so all sediments, trash and other debris can go straight from your yard out to the ocean.

During a home improvement project, you can do a lot to protect the watershed, and ultimately, our beaches. If you are hiring a contractor, hire one who cares and tell them you want them to keep the site neat and clean – and not to allow any pollutants to go into the street or storm drains.

**Home Improvement Project Best Practices:**

- Ask your contractors how they plan to handle disposal of used materials, including any liquid wastes, prior to beginning work.
  - Position drip pans, where appropriate, to avoid spills and leaks.
  - Clean up any spills immediately with absorbent materials and dispose of them properly.
  - Use water-based paint whenever possible, and dispose of clean-up water through a sanitary sewer.
  - Sweep or vacuum dry debris, including chips and dust of non-lead paint, and dispose of it in the trash. [Note: Dispose of all old paint and the chips and dust of marine or lead-based paints only through an authorized hazardous waste collection provider.]
- Know where your storm drains are around the work area and protect them during projects.
- Keep dirt and sediment on the project site and out of the streets, creeks, and storm drains. Dirt carries with it many pollutants including bacteria and heavy metals.
  - Use sandbags and other barriers around the project site to prevent erosion.
  - Ensure vehicles, equipment, and personnel do not track mud or dirt onto the street.
  - Stockpile materials such as sand, gravel, and dirt on a tarp and keep them covered to protect them from erosion by wind and rain.
  - Prevent runoff from leaving the project site. Never hose off the site to clean up.
  - Schedule projects for dry weather periods to reduce risk of unwanted runoff.
- Capture waste waters for disposal in a sanitary sewer, or allow to soak into the ground on-site if possible. Be aware of possible fines associated with allowing materials to run into the storm drain system.

Whether you are doing concrete and masonry work, landscaping, painting, or installing a pool or spa, you can help keep an eye on the environment and protect Ventura County's watersheds. Plan ahead so that your home improvement projects add to the value of our community, without harming our waterways and ocean.

### **The Watershed Should Only Shed Water**

The Community for a Clean Watershed is coalition of stormwater quality management agencies in the cities and unincorporated areas of Ventura County. Its message is "The Watershed Should Only Shed Water" and its goal is to raise awareness among residents and business-owners of the issues affecting the health of Ventura County's watershed. Learn more at Community for a Clean Watershed on Facebook or go to [www.cleanwatershed.org](http://www.cleanwatershed.org).

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