



Ligonier Borough Storm Water Authority

Frequently Asked Questions About Stormwater

ABOUT STORMWATER

Q: What is stormwater?

A: Stormwater is drainage runoff from the surface of the land resulting from rain, snow, and ice melting. In natural settings, stormwater soaks slowly into the ground, a process that depends on pervious surfaces such as grassland, meadows, lawns, and other natural landscapes. In developed areas, those surfaces are replaced with hard, or impervious, surfaces such as roofs, streets, sidewalks, parking lots, patios, and other structures. The result is that there is less natural area available to absorb water, so a larger volume of stormwater flows at a faster pace over hard surfaces, collecting sediment, chemicals, and debris along the way. When it is not controlled, stormwater overwhelms streams and causes flooding, soil erosion, and surface water pollution.

Q: Why is stormwater a problem in Ligonier Borough?

A: Stormwater runoff from land modified by human activity threatens public health and safety by decreasing infiltration of rainwater and increasing runoff flows and velocities, which overtax the carrying capacity of existing streams and storm sewers, cause property damage, and greatly increase the cost to the public of managing stormwater. Inadequate management of accelerated runoff harms surface water resources by changing natural hydrologic patterns, accelerating stream flows, increasing scour and erosion of streambeds and streambanks, destroying aquatic habitat, and elevating concentrations of sediment, nutrients, heavy metals, and pathogens, while reducing groundwater recharge.

Q: What requires the Borough to manage stormwater?

A: Stormwater management in Pennsylvania is governed by the Stormwater Management Act of 1978 (Act 167), which requires municipalities to adopt and implement ordinances consistent with the applicable county watershed stormwater plan. The Borough adopted its Stormwater Management Ordinance, Ordinance No. 576, on June 11, 2020, to carry out these requirements.

Q: What is the Ligonier Borough Storm Water Authority?

A: The Authority is the entity responsible for the operation, construction, and maintenance of the Borough's stormwater infrastructure. It administers the Stormwater Program and User Fee.

Q: What does “impervious surface” mean?

A: An impervious surface is one that prevents the infiltration of water into the ground in a manner that such water enters the ground under natural conditions pre-existent to development. Impervious surface includes, but is not limited to, roofs, outdoor living spaces, patios, garages, storage sheds, and similar structures, parking or driveway areas including pavement, concrete, pavers, brick, and compacted aggregate, and any private streets and sidewalks. Travel areas proposed to initially be gravel or crushed stone are assumed to be impervious surfaces.

Q: What is an ERU?

A: ERU stands for Equivalent Residential Unit, the base billing unit for the stormwater fee, much like the base unit used for other utilities. One ERU equals 2,400 square feet of impervious area, which has been determined to be the typical amount of impervious cover on a single-household residential property in Ligonier Borough. A typical single-family home is charged one ERU. For other properties, the actual impervious area is measured and divided by 2,400 to determine the number of ERUs billed.

THE USER FEE

Q: What is the stormwater fee used to pay for?

A: It includes regulatory compliance, floodplain management, capital improvements including storm sewer installation and replacement, culvert upgrades, curbing, stream restoration, and stormwater planning and engineering; and the operation, maintenance, and administration of the stormwater system.

Q: Who pays for stormwater management?

A: All owners of developed property are charged a stormwater fee based on their impact on the system, including owners that are otherwise exempt from real property taxes, such as churches, schools, government properties, and non-profit entities.

Q: Do tax-exempt properties have to pay?

A: Yes. Property taxes are based on assessed value, while the stormwater fee is assessed based on how much impervious surface contributes to stormwater runoff.

Q: What properties are charged a fee?

A: Every developed parcel in Ligonier Borough pays a stormwater fee. A parcel is considered developed if it contains 400 square feet or more of impervious surface. Parcels with less than 400 square feet of impervious surface are exempt.

Q: Why not just charge a flat fee instead of measuring everyone's impervious surface?

A: Billing based on the amount of impervious surface on a property is the most equitable method of determining the fee. Impervious surfaces reduce infiltration into the ground and increase the amount of runoff entering the Borough's system. Over the long term, the amount of impervious area on a property is directly related to the amount of stormwater that flows off it and into nearby streams and creeks.

Q: How much is the fee?

A: The fee is \$100.00 per ERU per year. A typical single-family residence is billed one ERU, or \$100.00 annually. Commercial properties with more impervious area are billed proportionally, based on their measured impervious surface divided by 2,400 square feet and rounded up to the nearest ERU.

BILLING AND APPEALS

Q: How am I billed?

A: The Authority mails an annual stormwater fee invoice to each property.

Q: What happens if I pay late?

A: A late fee of \$10.00 is applied.

Q: How did the Authority determine the impervious area on my property?

A: Impervious area was measured for each developed parcel from aerial imagery and Borough parcel mapping.

Q: I think my bill is calculated incorrectly. What should I do?

A: Contact the Authority office first; many questions can be resolved by reviewing the measured impervious area for your parcel. If you still believe the fee has been calculated incorrectly, file a written appeal with the Authority stating the reasons for the challenge.

CREDITS

Q: Is there any way to earn credits to reduce my fee?

A: Yes. Owners who install and maintain stormwater best management practices, or BMPs, on their property can qualify for a reduction in their stormwater fee. Credits are available for rain barrels, dry wells, infiltration trenches, detention basins, rain gardens, and green roofs. The policies and application procedures are described in the Authority's Stormwater Credit Manual.

Q: How do I apply for a credit?

A: Submit a completed Stormwater Fee Credit Application to the Authority, along with design documentation or an engineering analysis for the BMP, as-built plans or construction drawings, your operation and maintenance plan, and a signed maintenance agreement. There is no application fee. To be eligible, you must be current with your stormwater fees and be able to demonstrate that the BMP has been installed and is functioning as intended. The application form and the standard maintenance agreement are included in the Stormwater Credit Manual.

Q: When does an approved credit take effect, and how long does it last?

A: Approved credits apply to the next billing and are not retroactive to fees already paid. A credit is valid for three (3) years. Before it expires, a renewal application must be submitted with maintenance records for the previous three years. If no renewal application is submitted, the credit expires, and the Authority may require an expired credit to go through recertification or reapplication.

Q: Can a credit be revoked?

A: Yes. After an application or renewal is submitted, the Authority may inspect the parcel to verify the information provided. If an inspection determines that a BMP is not being maintained or is not adequately functioning, the Authority may withhold the credit until the BMP is restored to good working order or may revoke or terminate the credit.

MORE INFORMATION

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: Contact Ligonier Borough Storm Water Authority at 120 East Main Street, Ligonier, PA 15658 or by phone at 724-238-9852. The Borough website is ligonierborough.com. The Stormwater Credit Manual, the Stormwater Fee Credit Application, and the Stormwater Management Ordinance are available on the website.