



Cities slap fees on storm runoff

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By **Dennis Cauchon**, USA TODAY

New environmental regulations are prompting cities to impose fees on property owners for the cost of managing storm water runoff, the leading cause of water pollution in most of the nation.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has started issuing a series of limits on storm water pollution that will require local governments to spend large amounts of money on water quality and soon start slowly reshaping America's roads, housing developments and even the traditional lawn.

The EPA for the first time is placing specific limits on how much storm water pollution can flow into the nation's streams, rivers, lakes and bays. Federal courts have ruled that the Clean Water Act requires more stringent regulations.

Storm water — from roofs, roads, parking lots, farms — carries oil, manure, sediments and sometimes raw sewage. It has created problems from increased flooding to muddy rivers and a New Jersey-sized aquatic "dead zone" in the [Gulf of Mexico](#).

Most local governments pay for storm water systems from general tax revenue. Faced with budget gaps, cities and counties are moving to storm water fees — like water and utility bills — based on how much rainwater flows off a property.

The fees have generated stiff opposition in some places. [Seminole County](#) commissioners in Florida rejected a fee after 500 people attended a hearing to protest. "It's a tax on rain," says anti-tax activist Douglas Bruce, who led a successful effort to have Colorado Springs voters repeal a storm water fee.

Fees typically range from \$2 to \$10 a month for an average home. The amount depends on how much space is consumed by roofs, driveways and other surfaces. Large retail stores, schools and airports can pay thousands of dollars a month:

- Hays, Kan., homeowners will start paying \$4 a month in April to raise \$378,000 a year for storm water improvements. Haverhill, Mass., and Urbandale, Iowa, are adding fees, too.
- Maryland is considering requiring cities and counties to charge storm water fees.
- The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District has been sued by business groups for trying to impose a \$4.75 monthly fee in the Cleveland area.

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