

BILLING QUESTIONS

What is an ERU?

An ERU (equivalent residential unit) is a measure of impervious surface on a property. The City of West Des Moines has established one ERU as 4,000 square feet of impervious area.

How are the stormwater management fees calculated?

Property owners are charged stormwater management fees based on the total impervious surface area on the property. Each 4,000 square feet of impervious surface area is one Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). A tiered stormwater management fees system is based on the total impervious surface area divided by one ERU. All properties with one ERU or less are charged the fee for one ERU. Properties with greater than one ERU of impervious surface area are charged for the total ERUs rounded up to the nearest 1/2 ERU.

For example: a property with 9,600 square feet of total impervious surface would be billed the equivalent stormwater management fees for 2.5 ERUs.

9,600 square feet divided by 4,000 square feet (1 ERU) equals 2.4 ERUs

2.4 ERUs rounded up to nearest 1/2 ERU is 2.5 ERUs

2.5 ERUs times \$2.75/ERU equals stormwater management fees of \$6.88 per month.

Each duplex dwelling and each town home dwelling are treated as a single-family dwelling.

How are stormwater management fees charged to properties with multiple water meters?

Multiple family dwellings and commercial/industrial properties with multiple water meters on the property will have the property's total stormwater management fees divided evenly among each water meter account (excluding irrigation water meters).

For example: a property with 3 water meters and 1 irrigation water meter with 24,000 square feet of total impervious area would be billed as follows:

24,000 square feet of total impervious areas equals 6 ERUs

6 ERUs times \$2.75/ERU equals \$16.50 stormwater management fees.

\$16.50 divided by 3 water meters equals \$5.50 per water meter.

\$5.50 of stormwater management fees will be billed to each of the three water meter accounts.

How are stormwater management fees collected?

Stormwater management fees will be billed by West Des Moines Water Works as part of corresponding property owner's West Des Moines Municipal Services bill.

How much will a typical single-family homeowner pay for stormwater management fees?

A typical single-family homeowner with less than 4,000 square feet of impervious surface area on the property will pay stormwater management fees of \$2.75 per month.

If I think my bill is incorrect, what should I do?

Stormwater utility bills are based on the amount of impervious surface that is present on the property. The impervious surface is calculated from the latest aerial photographs and/or approved site plans. If you think the impervious surface area was incorrectly calculated and caused your stormwater management fees to be incorrect, you can appeal by preparing an as-built survey quantifying the actual amount of impervious surface on the property. This as-built survey should be submitted with the supporting application to the West Des Moines City Manager's office. Before appealing, however, it may be advantageous to schedule time with a City staff member to view the data used to determine the fee being charged.

Stormwater Utility

West Des Moines, Iowa

*Answers to
Frequently
Asked Questions*

For more information
visit www.wdm-ia.com.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is stormwater runoff and why do we need to manage it?

Stormwater runoff is rainfall or snowmelt that flows from saturated permeable surfaces and runs off from impervious surfaces like roofs and paved driveways, sidewalks, parking lots and streets. Stormwater runoff creates drainage and flooding problems, making sump pumps work hard. Stormwater runoff often picks-up pollutants such as oils, grease, fertilizers, pesticides, litter and metals. Stormwater runoff is collected and conveyed through ditches, culverts, intakes, catch basins and storm sewers directly into creeks, streams, lakes and rivers without being treated to remove pollutants.

New federal laws regulating stormwater runoff require the City of West Des Moines to evaluate, develop and implement a comprehensive stormwater quality management program to protect property and improve water quality.

What is an impervious surface and what does it have to do with stormwater?

An impervious surface is any surface area that does not readily absorb water. Because water cannot be absorbed by impervious surfaces, the water running off of impervious surfaces must be managed through well planned, constructed and maintained stormwater facilities to prevent flooding and pollution in receiving waters.

The stormwater management fee is based on the amount of total impervious surface on your property.

Impervious surface is a good gauge of how much your property is contributing to the overall need for stormwater management facilities in the City of West Des Moines.

Is gravel considered an impervious surface?

Yes. It is difficult for water to soak into a packed gravel surface. Once gravel is compacted, surface water runs off of it much like a paved surface. The gravel may slow the flow of water from an area, but nearly the same amount of runoff will flow from under the gravel as if the gravel was not there. Many flat roofs are covered with gravel, but they still shed the rainwater that falls on them. In addition, if cars or heavy equipment are traveling on gravel surfaces, the runoff typically carries pollutants like metals or petroleum into our waterways.

Why do we have stormwater management fees?

The West Des Moines City Council is considering the creation a stormwater utility and to charge stormwater management fees effective June 1, 2006. The stormwater management fees raise revenues needed to fund the City of West Des Moines' stormwater management program and facilities. This program brings the City into compliance with federal regulations and safeguards our community directly through improved inspection and maintenance of critical stormwater infrastructure and indirectly through public education and outreach programs.

Stormwater utility charges properties in the City of West Des Moines based on that property's contribution to the need for stormwater management and facilities.

The utility uses the amount of impervious surface on a property as the primary basis in calculating stormwater management fees. This user-fee system is a fair and equitable way to raise revenue for the program by charging those who directly contribute to its need. This method presents our community with an alternative to the unfair across-the-board property tax hike.

How are the stormwater management fees different from a tax? What is a user-fee?

The stormwater management fee is a user-fee, much like the fee that you pay for your water utility or sanitary sewer utility services. Users of these services are charged for the demand they place on the system. The stormwater that flows off of your property places a demand on a vast system of stormwater infrastructure, which is costly to operate and maintain. Stormwater must be channeled through a system of ditches, culverts, intakes, catch basins and pipes to discharge it into local creeks, streams, lakes and rivers.

Who pays the fees?

Owners of all developed land in the City of West Des Moines pay the stormwater management fees. This includes residential properties, commercial properties, industrial properties, churches, schools and other non-profit organizations and federal, state, county and city governments. Undeveloped land is not charged stormwater management fees because it does not have impervious surfaces.

How are stormwater management fees used?

The stormwater management fees pay for operations and maintenance costs of the stormwater management and facilities.

Some of the services tied to the stormwater management program include:

- Storm sewer system maintenance, repairs and construction
- Illicit discharge detection and elimination
- Public education and outreach
- Improving water quality

Do other cities have stormwater user-fees?

A number of municipalities in the United States have established stormwater utilities to fund their stormwater management programs and facilities. Some of the communities in Iowa include: Ames, Bettendorf, Boone, Burlington, Carroll, Clive, Coralville, Des Moines, Dubuque, Iowa City, Norwalk, Sioux City and Windsor Heights. The number of stormwater utilities utilizing user-fees in the Des Moines metropolitan area is expected to increase to pay costs associated with developing stormwater management programs that comply with new federal requirements.

Will the City of West Des Moines stormwater management program include the maintenance of private drainage easements or the correction of private drainage issues?

No. The City Council has decided against maintaining stormwater structures and easements on private property since doing so would have greatly increased the cost to all property owners in the City of West Des Moines.