Huntington Stormwater Utility
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Impervious Surface Water Quality Fee

Frequently Asked Questions

Beginning in approximately 30 days, **nonresidential customers** who receive the **water quality fee** from the Huntington Water Quality Board (Stormwater Utility and Sanitary Board) will see an increase in their monthly bill. This document explains the reasons for the increase, how the fee is calculated and what to do if you believe there is an error with your bill.

The water quality fee is found on your Sanitary Board bill next to your sewer charges. The purpose of the water quality fee is to allow the Stormwater Utility to operate and maintain Huntington's floodwall system and manage stormwater runoff in the city. The water quality fee applies to all parcels, even if you do not have water or sewer service.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection require communities to implement stormwater programs that reduce pollution.

What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is polluted runoff from rain or melting snow. City landscapes contain large areas of impervious surfaces that prevent water from seeping into the ground. Because of this, large amounts of water accumulate above the surface. This water will collect pollutants such as bacteria, sediment, pesticides, oils and greases before eventually entering our streams and rivers. These large amounts of water also cause nuisance flooding when not properly managed on site.

What is impervious surface?

Impervious surface is ground that is covered by buildings, parking lots, driveways, gravel, pavement, compacted dirt lots on industrial sites, or any other material that does not allow rain water to soak into the ground.

What is considered a nonresidential property?

According to Article 935, nonresidential properties are those parcels that have multi-unit residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental entities on the property. Multi-unit residential are condominiums and apartment buildings.

Why do nonresidential properties have to pay a higher fee?

Nonresidential property generally contains more impervious surface than residential or single-family residences. This impervious surface creates more polluted runoff that flows into Huntington's drainage system. The massive amounts of runoff can create problems in our receiving streams as well as cause

nuisance flooding. An example of what happens when there is a large amount of runoff that is not managed onsite is the flooding of Huntington's underpasses. When there is too much water for the pipes and drainage system, water pools in the underpasses.

How did you measure the impervious area of my property?

The Huntington Stormwater Utility used high-resolution aerial photography to determine the impervious area of each parcel. Photos were taken in spring 2015. Geographical Information System (GIS) measurements were used in the determination. The information was also cross-referenced with existing county parcel records. [1]

Why is there a focus on impervious areas?

Impervious areas have been determined to be the most significant factor influencing the volume and rate of runoff generated on a property. The use of impervious area is the industry standard approach used across the United States to developing stormwater fees.

I live in a condominium or apartment, which is considered nonresidential. Will I receive a water quality bill?

The water quality fee is sent to the property owner or the condo association. The association will be responsible for paying the water quality fee and collecting the necessary funds from the individual apartment or condo owners.

I live in a single family house, will my water quality fee increase?

No, single family residences will not see an increase.

Am I being charged for rain falling on my property?

While the stormwater program is in place to manage the effects of runoff carried by rainwater, the fee is in no way related to the amount of rain that falls. Users are charged a fee for runoff discharged from their property to the city's stormwater management system, not the amount of rain falling on their property. Property owners control the level of development (impervious area) on their properties, which directly impacts the runoff characteristics of their site.

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[1] DISCLAIMER
Huntington Stormwater Utility's (HSU) determination of impervious area was based upon the best available data at the time of calculation. Imagery utilized in the calculation process is a time stamp image of the condition of the surface at the time the photo was taken. No warranty is given or implied as to the contents of the imagery at the time of collection. Tax Parcel boundaries were used in the calculations and are approximate and not surveyed. Parcel boundaries and ownership information are property of and maintained by the county tax assessor's office. No warranty is given or implied as to the accuracy of the tax parcel boundary or parcel information used in the impervious area calculations. All analysis results are property of the HSU and any inquiries regarding the data utilized or calculation results should be directed to the Huntington Stormwater Utility.

How is the fee calculated for nonresidential properties?

Article 935.04 establishes that owners of real property with impervious area shall pay the water quality fees. Article 935.06 sets the fee amount.

The first 3,000 square feet of impervious surface is $7.15. For each 1,000 square feet of impervious surface over the base rate, it is $1.05. For example, if you have 6,000 square feet of impervious surface, your water quality fee would be $10.30.

Nonresidential
First 3,000 impervious square feet. $7.15 per month
Between 3,000 and up to maximum of 1 million impervious square feet in the aggregate $1.05 per 1,000 Sq. feet per month
Minimum monthly charge $7.15 per month

What does revenue from the water quality (Stormwater) fee go toward?

1. Maintenance, repair and sometimes replacement of storm drainage infrastructure.

2. Operation and maintenance of Huntington's floodwall and levee system.

3. Implementation of the federally required stormwater management program to reduce runoff pollution from entering Huntington's streams and rivers.

Why am I being charged this fee?

To pay for the programs listed above. The fees collected are used solely for stormwater and floodwall activities and accounted for separately.

Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?

Providing maintenance and repairs on the storm sewer infrastructure benefits all residents by providing for efficient drainage and reducing the occurrence of nuisance street flooding.

Operating and maintaining the floodwall benefits all residents in the city by keeping the cost of flood insurance low, thereby, keeping the costs of goods and services low.

Managing polluted runoff is beneficial to everyone by reducing nuisance flooding that inconveniences transportation and can hinder emergency vehicles. It also helps to reduce pollution that flows into our receiving streams, thereby bringing the city into compliance with federal water pollution control permits.

While you may not have drainage problems on your particular property, runoff generated from your property may be contributing to problems downstream. The approach being taken through the Stormwater Utility recognizes that everyone contributes to the runoff problem, and everyone will share in the results of the program (improved water quality, reduced flooding, unimpaired access to roads, etc.).

When will the water quality fee change take effect?

The Stormwater Utility is currently working on the impervious surface database. This process will be complete in approximately 30 days.

I do not dispute the provided measurement of my property, but I want to lower my bill. Are there programs or other incentives to promote reducing impervious surfaces?

Not yet, but credits are being studied by the Stormwater Utility as a way to lower your water quality fee. Practices that the property owner can install that allow rain to soak into the ground, such as bioretention cells, porous pavements, etc., are being considered to offset the fee.

I believe the impervious surface measurement for my property is incorrect and I would like for the measurement of my property to be re-evaluated. How do I do this?

If the property owner believes the impervious surface measurement for his or her property is incorrect, the property owner may provide additional information for consideration by the Stormwater Utility. The additional information must be provided on the form established by the Stormwater Utility for that purpose. The Stormwater Utility will use additional information to determine, in its sole discretion, whether to modify the impervious surface measurement.

What would happen if I decided not to pay the adjusted amount?

The Stormwater Utility is provided authority in state code to turn off water service for nonpayment of the water quality fee. The Stormwater Utility can also file a lien against the property owner and file a report to the credit reporting bureaus.

How did we get to this point?

Huntington's stormwater management infrastructure is critical to Huntington's economic future. The ability to minimize street flooding, prevent river flooding and reduce water pollution resulting from stormwater improves the health, safety and quality of life for all businesses and residents of Huntington. To that end, City leadership developed the Huntington Stormwater Utility.

On June 23, 2014, Huntington City Council unanimously passed an Ordinance creating the Huntington Stormwater Utility. This new Utility was to be responsible for operating and maintaining the storm sewer system, the floodwall/levee system and for implementation of the federal MS4 program.[2] The water quality fee is used solely for these activities and is accounted for separately.

[2] MS4 means Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System. This is a federally mandated clean water permit authorized by the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). Stormwater runoff is one of the leading causes of water pollution in the United States. The MS4 permit regulates stormwater discharges from municipalities and is a way to clean up runoff pollution. In 2010, the City of Huntington was fined for failure to implement a MS4 stormwater program. The Huntington Stormwater Utility now implements this program.