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Rain, Flooding, and the Land Beneath Your Feet

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When it's dry, we want rain; when it's raining, we complain it's too wet; when it's 90 degrees, we're too hot, and then when snow falls, we're too cold. Just now, perhaps we all would agree; rain, rain go away come again another day, possibly June or July when our crops will hopefully be ready for a refreshing drink.

Look around. An overabundance of rain can cause many potential problems. The most obvious this Spring is flooding. However, at the SWCD, our concern is the much greater problem of soil erosion and water pollution. This year, we have seen a tremendous amount of water due to snow melt and multiple heavy rainfall events. Next time you take a walk or a Sunday drive, look at how much erosion has occurred this past winter and spring. Notice how muddy our ditches and streams are.

After a rainfall or snowmelt, fast-moving water runs across our landscape picking up contaminants such as sediment, nutrients or bacteria. The water carries these pollutants to small streams that eventually flow into larger rivers. This pollution is called non-point pollution. This pollution can happen everywhere; from construction areas, farm fields, driveways, roads and sidewalks.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the most common pollutant entering our streams, rivers, and lakes is sediment. While natural erosion produces nearly 30 percent of the total sediment in the United States, accelerated erosion from human use of land accounts for the remaining 70 percent.

So, why care? Soil is an important ingredient in your everyday life. We build on them, play on them, drive on them, eat food grown in or raised on them, take medicines from them, wear clothes we wouldn't have without soils, drink water that wouldn't be clean without soils, breathe air we wouldn't have without the plants and trees growing in soils. The entire earth — every ecosystem, every living organism — is dependent upon soils.

This soil erosion can also compound our flooding problems. Road ditches, storm drains and catch basins are designed to carry rain water away from roads and homes. Eroded soil can fill up these important structures, increasing the potential for flooding.

Water polluted with sediment can also harm plants and animals. Muddy water prevents animals from seeing food. Murky water hinders natural vegetation from growing in water. Sediment in stream beds disrupts the natural food chain by destroying the habitat where the smallest stream organisms live and causing massive declines in fish population.

Nutrients transported by sediment can activate blue-green algae that release toxins and can make swimmers sick.

If these aren't enough reasons to be concerned about soil erosion think about this. It takes, through natural processes, more than 500 years to form one inch of topsoil. Soil is the other black gold. We can't afford to lose this valuable resource. If we all do our part to be good stewards of the land we will be able to ensure a great future for the next generation. Here are just a few things that you can do.

Be cautious not to hose down sidewalks and driveways, which may result in sediment and pollutants running off into storm drains which lead to ditches and streams.

Never leave bare soil, seed down and use straw erosion control blankets to hold seed in place until established. Leave buffer strips along edges of ditches, streams or creeks. This will create a safe buffer zone to help minimize erosion and naturally filter storm water runoff that may contain sediment.

If you are involved in production agriculture, you should be utilizing waterways, filter strips, WASCObS (water and sediment control basins), or practicing minimum and no tillage. Ohio is very fortunate to have productive soils .

It is our responsibility to conserve and protect this resource. For more information on conservation contact SWCD at 513-887-3270 or visit www.Butlerswcd.org.

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