

Down the drain on JBLM

By Cathy Hamilton-Wissmer, JBLM Directorate of Public Works December 4, 2018



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Joe Blaine, a JBLM stormwater specialist, uses a dip cup to sample stormwater on Joint Base Lewis-McChord before it leaves the installation Nov. 26 (Photo Credit: Down the drain on JBLM KEY WORDS Joint Base LewisMcChord, JBLM, environmental, stormwater, storm drains, bioswales, runoff CUTLINE Joe Blaine, a JBLM stormwater specialist, uses a dip cup to sample stormwater on Joint Base LewisMcChord before it leaves)

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Stormwater is water from rain and snowmelt events that flow over land or impervious surfaces such as roofs, streets, parking lots and does not soak into the ground. As it runs off, it can pick up pollutants like trash, chemicals, oils and dirt.

Stormwater flows into the storm drains or other conveyances into creeks, ponds, marshes and lakes on and around Joint Base Lewis-McChord. This water is not treated by the wastewater treatment plant at Solo Point.

Contaminated stormwater runoff is the leading threat to Washington's urban waters, streambeds, banks and habitats.

According to Becky Kowalski, JBLM stormwater program manager, sampling requirements are put into place by the Washington State Department of Ecology and the Environmental Protection Agency as part of the permit process. JBLM stormwater program operates under two distinct permits: Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit and the Multi-Sector General Permit (MSGP)

"These permits require routine water quality monitoring and analysis," Kowalski said. "We meet the requirements and work with our Pierce County partners on surface water quality issues, too."

Joe Blaine, a JBLM stormwater specialist, collects stormwater samples for metals (copper and zinc) at the outfall, where the water leaves the installation or as it goes into the canal in DuPont.

"Stormwater from Lewis North washes through an oil water separator and out a big pipe into Bells Marsh in DuPont," Blaine said. "We test regularly as part of permit requirements. Zinc and copper are the most common metal pollutants in surface water. It can be dust from a brake pad, metal roofs, chain-link fencing, that sort of thing. Because of regular testing we notice if something spikes, and then we find the problem and fix it."

Once samples are collected, Blaine said they are tested for a wide-range of things:

- metals,
- nitrates,
- phosphorus,
- total suspended solids,
- dissolved metals.

"Clover Creek on McChord has an auto-sampler, a machine that collects 24, 1 liter samples that are composited," Blaine said. "We also go out monthly with Pierce County surface water staff to check the temperature gauges in Clover Creek."

Directorate of Public Works on JBLM has focused on many projects over the last several years to assist in managing stormwater: bioswales along Pendleton Avenue treat and infiltrate stormwater which recharges our ground water, the recent construction at the Liberty Gate enhanced stormwater features to reduce flooding during high rain events, and when complete, the shared parking lot at Waller Hall, will have new pavement, curbs, sidewalks, bioswales to prevent flooding.

Unmanaged stormwater runoff can degrade water quality, contribute to flooding and drought, pollute shellfish beds, damage salmon habitat and contaminate swimming areas.

"Remember only 'Rain down the Drain' on Joint Base Lewis-McChord," Kowalski said. "Protecting stormwater is in everyone's best interests. Please report any spills to JBLM 911 and the Hazardous Materials Response Team can respond."

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