

Understanding Montgomery County's Water Quality Protection Charge

Stormwater runoff originates during precipitation when water flows over the ground. Hard surfaces, such as streets and rooftops, increase runoff by preventing water from soaking into the ground. Water running over hard surfaces can pick up sediment, chemicals, debris, and toxins which are carried to local waterways. These pollutants prevent waterways from being fishable and swimmable.

In 2012, the State of Maryland passed the Watershed Protection and Restoration Program (HB- 987) which mandates that counties subject to a certain municipal stormwater permit institute a stormwater remediation fee. The purpose of the charge is to manage pollution carried by stormwater into local waterways.

The collected charges are placed in a *dedicated fund* and used to finance projects that treat polluted stormwater. Examples include such projects as stream and pond restoration, storm drain cleaning, stormwater facility inspection, maintenance and upgrades, tree planting, water quality monitoring, watershed planning, and stormwater educational programming. The Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) is similar to fees for other public services such as sewer, drinking water, and highways.

Who is required to pay the Water Quality Protection Charge?

The WQPC applies to the nine largest counties in Maryland (Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's) and Baltimore City that are federally required to treat stormwater runoff. Property owners within these jurisdictions, with some exceptions, are required to pay the WQPC.

The charge structure is established independently by each county/city and differs across the State.

What does the 2013 Water Quality Protection Charge look like in Montgomery County?

The WQPC is calculated based on the amount of impervious surface on your property, and the type of property you own. Calculations are based on the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). One ERU = 2,406 square feet, which is the median amount of impervious surface on residential properties. In 2013, the WQPC for one ERU is \$88.40. The following estimates are based on the 2013 charge. [Note: The rate is set by the Montgomery County Council annually in May. See the Montgomery County WQPC website for current rates: <http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/dectmpl.asp?url=/Content/dep/water/wqpc.asp>]

Residential homeowners (including detached homes and townhomes) are in a tier structure, and charged between \$29.17 and \$265.20 annually, depending on the total area of impervious surface. **Agricultural property owners** are in a tier structure, and are charged between \$29.17 and \$265.20 annually. The charge is based on the total area of non-business related impervious surfaces. **Multi-family residential and condo owners** are charged based on the total area of impervious surface on the property, divided by the number of owners within the property boundary. **Non-residential property owners** (including commercial properties, HOA-owned properties, non-profit entities such as religious institutions and healthcare facilities, properties dedicated to non-governmental charity and institutional uses, and government-owned properties) are charged \$88.40

for each ERU of impervious surface on their property.

501(c)(3) Organizations are in a tier structure based on impervious surface area, and charged \$88.40 for each ERU of impervious surface on their property. Tier 1 properties will pay no more than \$132.60, Tier 2 properties will pay no more than \$795.60, and Tier 3 properties will pay no more than \$2,033.20.

Who is eligible for the Hardship Exemption?

To qualify for a hardship exemption, your household income must not exceed 170% of the Federal poverty level or you must be approved for benefits under the Maryland Energy Assistance Program for the current billing year.

What is the WQPC Credit Program?

Residential property owners can receive a reduction of up to 50% off their WQPC by installing stormwater management practices. Multi-family and non-residential property owners can reduce their charge by up to 60%.

Property owners who own and maintain onsite stormwater management practices can receive a credit based on the volume of water captured. The goal of the credit program is to provide incentives to property owners for meeting standards to control and treat stormwater to the maximum extent practicable.

The amount of the credit is based on the type of stormwater management and the volume of water treated. More intensive practices, such as wet ponds, dry ponds, and bioretention, treat a lot of stormwater, and therefore, provide a large credit. Less intensive practices, such as rain barrels, cisterns, and rain gardens, provide a smaller credit.

Department of Environmental Protection no later than October 31 of the year before the payment is due. Supporting documentation must include photos or engineering documents, if available.

To apply for this credit, contact the DEP at: WQPC.Credits@montgomerycountymd.gov

Always remember with stormwater - *slow* it **down** and *soak* it **up**!

Additional Resources

Maryland Department of the Environment
Stormwater Fee FAQ:
<http://www.mde.state.md.us/programs/Marylander/Pages/StormwaterFeeFAQ.aspx>

House Bill 987
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/webmga/frmMain.aspx?ys=2012rs%2fbillfile%2fhb0987.htm>

For further questions about the Montgomery County WQPC, contact Vicky Wan at Vicky.Wan@montgomerycountymd.gov

Contact Amanda Rockler (arockler@umd.edu, 301-590-2816), Watershed Restoration Specialist for Montgomery, Howard, and Fredrick Counties, to answer your questions about the charge and what you can do to reduce stormwater runoff on your property.

Please note: This factsheet is intended to provide an overview of the stormwater remediation fee at the time of publication. For more updates and information please go to:
<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov>

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This publication, *Understanding Montgomery County's Water Quality Protection Charge* (EBR-19), is a series of publications of the University of Maryland Extension and the Watershed Protection and Restoration Program. The information presented has met UME peer review standards, including internal and external technical review. For more information on related publications and programs, visit: http://extension.umd.edu/watershed_ Please visit <http://extension.umd.edu/> to find out more about Extension programs in Maryland.

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