



Let us clean up our stormwater drains

OPINION PIECE

It is no longer uncommon to see or find huge piles of wastes, old house items, construction waste or used products dumped by the roadside, in the forests, or non-designated dumping sites. This trend is on the rise and is increasingly becoming a problem because it hinders the objective of keeping the environment clean and can have serious impact on our lives.

Illegal dumping in water drains could pose a significant problem in the case of flooding.

Storm drains are designed for catching rain water only. Dumping trash or other pollutants down storm drain inlets is illegal and have environmental, social and economic effects. If a neighbour is disposing trash in the storm drain, they may not understand that drain inlets directly connect to our creeks and rivers.

If you have an amicable relationship with your neighbour, it may be just a matter of

informing and making them aware of its environmental impact. If it is someone who you feel is knowingly violating and repeatedly dumping into storm drains, please report to your local authorities.

Hence, the Constitution of South Africa guarantees everyone the right of access to an environment that is not harmful to their health and wellbeing and to have the natural environment protected for the benefit of current and future generations.

The public's continual disregard for the environment, including severe littering, caused stormwater drain blockages that occurred during the heavy rains. During past week's downpour which hit the KwaZulu Natal Capital, Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith, a number of drains were blocked. This is because of accumulation of litter clogging the drains.

We also know that much of the existing infrastructure that manages water to flow out

of our cities is vulnerable and outdated. We are talking about infrastructure that is over years old. It cannot keep up with growing cities and growing demands that we put on the environment.

During and after the devastating floods, thousands of us gave our time and money to help friends, family and neighbours to recover.

It is sad because, our people are losing business due to water flowing on the roads, supermarkets and causing mammoth potholes. We need to understand that the main function of roads is the carrying of vehicular, cycle and pedestrian traffic. However, they also have a stormwater management function. During minor storm events, the two functions should not be in conflict.

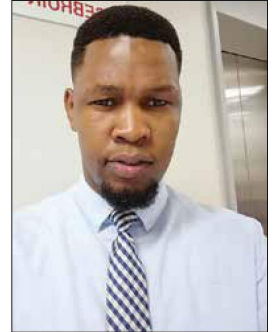
In major storm events, the traffic function will be interrupted, the flood control function becomes more important and the roads will act as channels. Good road layout

can substantially reduce stormwater-system and road-maintenance costs.

A well-planned road layout can significantly reduce the total stormwater-system costs. When integrated with a major system this may obviate the need for underground stormwater conduits. A key element is that the road layout should be designed to follow the natural contour of the land (Miles 1984). Coordinated planning with the road and drainage engineers is crucial at the pre-feasibility stage.

So, if we all work together to take action and invest in our own properties (whether they flood or not) we can help reduce the threat of similar levels of flooding in the future. Generally, if we are mindful of what we put down our drains, it is likely we won't need to clear them of debris very often. However, clogs can happen and it is important we know how to fix these problems as well as how to keep our drains well maintained.

Hence, the Department of Water and Sanitation is calling upon us to keep our storm drain clean by keeping our yard waste in a bin or container, keep a tight lid on our trash cans, especially during windy days and rake up leaves and debris on your property that could potentially clog the storm drain.



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