

Opinion

Stormwater rules need collective fight to prevent drowning

Monday, April 19, 2010

New stormwater rules meant to ensure clean drinking water are being viewed by municipal officials with concern, and for good reason. The changes threaten to produce a deluge of new regulations and costs that could drown the finances in some municipalities.

The changes are an outgrowth of the federal Clean Water Act and are part of a package of rules known as MS4, which stands for "municipal separate storm sewer systems."

The first phase of these rules, enacted several years ago, had to do with things like education and getting permits for large stormwater discharges. The next phase "affects every property in the United States," said Douglas R. Blazey, an attorney who met recently with a coalition of area municipalities.

Pottstown Borough Manager Jason Bobst recently told council that the rules could add \$7,500 to the cost of building a simple deck or \$15,000 to the cost of building a house. Some rule changes could also end up outlawing most pesticides and fertilizer, Bobst said.

Already more than 30 municipalities have joined in the first round of efforts to combat the requirements.

Barry Wert, an engineer advising the consortium, explained that the new rules will make municipalities responsible for another government-generated acronym — TDML — which stands for "total daily maximum load."

This defines the maximum amount of any type of pollution of concern — phosphates, sediment — that a particular stream will be allowed to carry.

He said this approach has already been tried in the Indian Creek, and Franconia and Lower Salford townships were informed they had to reduce the amount of sediment going into the creek from their townships by 98 percent.

Calling some of the new measures "draconian," Wert said "with all the new things to be done here, there will be quite a bit of work to put yourselves in compliance."

That work will include reviewing plans for stormwater control and inspections for even the smallest of property improvements.

The coalition is not trying to circumvent the rules, but rather "build a workable program that meets our needs, and the citizens' needs and the needs of the environment. We want to be listened to and we're much more likely to be listened to if we speak collectively," said Blazey.

The coalition also hopes to provide collective resources so that each individual township engineer, manager and governing body does not have to grapple with the changes alone.

Bobst gave a report on the issue and the opportunity to join the coalition at last week's council meeting and said he plans to propose the borough join the effort at a cost of \$2,000.

The stormwater issue is a serious one for municipalities, and neither area townships nor the borough should try going it alone. Collectively understanding and negotiating a system of compliance that people can live with is a wise move. We suggest area municipalities, including Pottstown, join in.

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