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## **Oakwood checking businesses for stormwater discharge**



Now's the time for Oakwood businesses to make sure their property is free of litter and spills.

City officials are starting to show up unannounced at businesses, with checklists in hand, to check for "illicit discharges" into the city's stormwater systems and eventually streams and Lake Lanier.

The effort, part of complying with state and federal mandates, shouldn't be a total surprise, however.

It began with a letter from Joe Hayes, codes enforcement officer for the city, saying the inspections were imminent and even including a copy of the checklist.

"Potential pollution sources identified as result of the on-site inspection will be brought to the business owner/operator's attention, along with requirements for corrective action," Hayes states in the letter.

Businesses that "choose not to comply with local ordinances" are subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 per day.

But officials are hoping the visits don't turn confrontational.

"We're doing this in an educational manner and not an punitive manner," said Catherine A. Fox, principal and senior environmental scientist with Fox Environmental in Decatur, and a consultant to Oakwood.

It's also not just an Oakwood thing, she said.

Area governments are required by the federal and state governments to protect local streams.

Local governments have permits that require them to do numerous things to prevent stormwater runoff, and one of those is working with businesses to "make sure the rainwater that hits businesses runs off clean," Fox said.

The businesses particularly targeted include car washes, restaurants and car-repair shops.

The city's efforts include handing out educational materials.

"Right now, what we're doing is educating all the business owners and operators and giving them a chance to learn more about this (initiative) and help us do this in a team effort," Fox said.

To prepare for the visits, businesses also can work to properly dispose of all contaminated soils and gravel and move potential stormwater pollutants undercover.

Thursday morning, Fox and Hayes visited Taco Bell restaurant off Mundy Mill Road. There, they looked over a trash disposal area and a retention pond that sits between the building and the drive-through lane.

They also met with shift manager Mayela Vasquez, who said she appreciated the city's efforts.

"I think (the program is) really good. You don't want a restaurant to be really dirty and have (a lot of) trash," Vasquez said. "Whatever you have outside is whatever you have inside — that's what I think."

Also, as part the program, city officials are walking along streams and visiting construction sites to look for discharges containing potential pollutants.

A recent press release from the city on the topic said that if pollution is found, "staff will identify the source ... and then work with residents, business owners, developers (and others) to eliminate the problem."

City officials also want the public to know how a stormwater system works.

"All the drainage (goes) to retention ponds and there's some treatment there, slow drainage, and you have gravel and fencing and things there to filter as much as it can," Hayes said.

The drainage then works its way into the land, leading to rivers and streams.

"With Lake Lanier being so low, (environmental officials) are learning you have to have super-clean water going in because it's not getting the filtration it was when (the lake) was full," Hayes said.

The city has set up a Web page, [www.cityofoakwood.net/WaterAndSewer.aspx](http://www.cityofoakwood.net/WaterAndSewer.aspx), to provide more information about stormwater management and encourages residents to report suspicious discharges to city officials.