

Keeping Our Streams Clean: Spotting and Preventing Illicit Discharges on Campus

When you think about pollution, your mind probably goes straight to smokestacks or big factories. But did you know that one of the biggest threats to local streams and rivers can come from right here on campus? It's called an *illicit discharge*, and it happens when anything other than clean rainwater makes its way into storm drains.

What Counts as an Illicit Discharge?

Storm drains are designed to carry rainwater directly into creeks, rivers, and lakes—without any treatment. That means when soap, chemicals, or even trash enter the system, they head straight into the environment. For ETSU, that means pollution flows from campus straight through Kings Commons and out to Boone Lake. Common examples on university campuses include:

- **Leaky vehicles** dripping oil or antifreeze in parking lots.
- **Cigarette butts, food wrappers, or litter** are tossed where it can be washed into drains.
- **Pet waste** leaches E. coli into our streams.
- **Leaves and Grass** from trees and green spaces.

Even small amounts add up. That one leaky car or spilled drink might seem harmless, but multiplied across hundreds of students, it can really damage aquatic life.

How You Can Spot a Problem

Students are the eyes and ears of campus. Here are a few telltale signs of illicit discharges:

- **Unusual smells** near a storm drain (think chemical, sewage, or gasoline).
- **Stains or residue** around a storm drain grate.
- **Cloudy, foamy, or oddly colored water** flowing into a drain.
- **Pipes with constant flow** even when it hasn't rained.

If you see something like this, don't ignore it—it could be a sign of pollution.



How You Can Help Prevent Illicit Discharges

The good news? Preventing these problems is simple, and every student can help:

1. **Keep trash and recyclables in bins**—not on the ground.
2. **Don't dump anything** (drinks, soap, paint, mop water, etc.) into storm drains. They're for rain only!
3. **Wash cars at commercial car washes** or designated campus wash areas, where wastewater is treated.
4. **Report suspicious discharges** to campus police or environmental health and safety staff. 423-439-4480 or 423-439-7900.
5. **Maintain your ride**—fix fluid leaks as soon as possible.

Why It Matters

The streams and rivers around campus are home to fish, crayfish, and even endangered species. They're also part of the community's drinking water supply. By staying alert and making small choices, ETSU students and staff can protect these waterways—and help the university stay in compliance with clean water rules.

So next time you see a storm drain, remember: **only rain down the drain!**



Stormwater Resources:

<https://www.etsu.edu/safety/occupational/stormwater.php#:~:text=If%20you%20suspect%20an%20illicit%20discharge%20or%20observe,Office%20at%20423-439-7900%20who%20will%20perform%20the%20investigation.>

https://issuu.com/kshoun/docs/stormwater_pollutants_brochure?fr=sNzhmODgzNTAzMzQ

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