

Polluted Stormwater Drains to Skaneateles Lake

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Many people in the United States drink water that has traveled hundreds of miles and undergone filtration at a treatment plant before reaching their taps. Residents of the City of Syracuse, the Village of Skaneateles, and many lake front residents on Skaneateles Lake, however, are special. They are members of an increasingly small club in this country that receives drinking water directly from local, unfiltered sources of drinking water. In this case, the source is Skaneateles Lake.

Clean, unfiltered water comes with a small caveat, however. As land surrounding the lake becomes more developed, the lake and its clean drinking water are ever more susceptible to becoming contaminated. Eroded dirt and sediment is a large threat to water quality in the lake. When land is disturbed for construction projects, it becomes an open wound. Heavy rain can carry large loads of dirt and sediments from construction sites to storm drains, ditches and streams that eventually drain into the lake.

There are many reasons why watershed residents should take note. Soil particles may carry pathogens that make water unsafe for drinking. Water clouded with dirt also disturbs the habitat of plants, fish and other wildlife living in the lake. Currently, Skaneateles Lake meets drinking water standards set forth by the NYS Department of Health. The City of Syracuse and the Village of Skaneateles have been issued filtration waivers by the state, saving millions of dollars that otherwise would be spent on filtration facilities. The filtration waivers have been granted because the lake's water is so clean and clear. Eroded sediment threatens water clarity. Given the current excellent quality of drinking water, and the high cost of building filtration facilities, residents of the Skaneateles Lake watershed have a vested interest in protecting their water source from contamination.

Protecting the lake is an issue that spans county and property lines. The Skaneateles Lake watershed covers about 70 square miles of land and includes parts of Onondaga, Cayuga and Cortland counties. Activities that disturb land **anywhere** in the watershed can potentially flush large amounts of sediments into the lake.

The 'Special Skaneateles Lake Watershed Rules and Regulations' were designed to protect the lake from pollution, and apply to all lands within the watershed, regardless of municipal affiliation. Under the rules, all construction activities within the watershed that expose 5,000 square feet or more of land must submit an erosion and sediment plan, and a written description of their project, to the City of Syracuse. An erosion and sediment control plan ensures that a construction site is properly stabilized (i.e. graded, seeded and mulched) during construction, and after work has been completed. Plans should be submitted to the Water Department before land is disturbed. For more information, call the City of Syracuse Water Department at 315-685-6486. Large construction activities within the watershed that disturb one or more acres of soil must also obtain a permit through the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. For more information, contact the NYS DEC at 315-426-7500.