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Stormwater - what you may not know about your property

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Most commercial property owners do not realize that the shopping mall or commercial site that they own has hidden surprises lurking underground. When properties are investigated or evaluated to determine if a site is viable, most prospective owners look for location, access to major roadways and area demographics and if municipal utilities are available.

In more cases than not, the prospective buyer pays little or no attention to one of the most critical components of his property, the storm drainage system that lies beneath. Those hidden underground systems are designed to collect the storm water and capture sediment that carry with them a number of pollutants in stormwater treatment devices called BMP's or best management practices. These BMP's include structures such as catch basins, infiltration basins and oil and sediment collection devices such as a Stormceptor.

Local regulatory agencies typically require urban developers to install stormwater treatment systems that trap pollutants before they enter waterways. In an urban environment, harmful pollutants like oil, nutrients and heavy metals attach themselves to the sediment particles. Thus, anywhere there are impervious surfaces like parking lots, parking garages, city streets or suburban roads there will be an increase in stormwater runoff that needs to be captured and treated. When the system is properly maintained both oil and sediment will be captured and can be disposed of properly. This is typically done on an annual basis.

In more cases than not, these systems lie underground passively functioning and at times minimally capturing the pollutants that flow through them. It is most likely due to a lack of maintenance. This is most often compounded by a lack of regulation and enforcement surrounding the maintenance issue. The recently written Massachusetts stormwater regulations defer this self policing of maintenance actions to the property owner or local authorities. Many local governmental agencies do not have the manpower to check that these devices are performing as designed. If property owners and developers are not forced to maintain treatment systems, chances are they are not going to spend the money required to do so.

The result, pollution, sediment and potential flooding will occur impacting both humans and wild habitat alike. Rules and regulations in a number of the New England states are continually being changed or made more stringent. It is highly recommended to check with local authorities for potential changes and investigate totally what your hidden assets may cost you in the long run. One way you can get more answers is to consider attending the EBC / Rinker Materials workshop to be held on November 4th, 2009. To register for this workshop, sign on to the EBC website www.ebcne.org.

Larry Galkowski, regional engineer for Rinker Materials, Westfield Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540