



Key Points

- *Water quality and water availability are quickly becoming significant environmental problems in communities across the United States.*
- *The built environment is a significant contributor to these problems – both through serving as sources of contaminated stormwater runoff and through diminishing opportunities for rainwater to enter the ground to replenish critical aquifers.*
- *Unrestricted development and urban sprawl create demands on groundwater resources for drinking water, process water and other water uses that will soon be unsustainable.*
- *The AIA strongly supports amending the Clean Water Act to tighten controls on stormwater pollution and create incentives for developers to channel rainwater into the ground, rather than creating contaminated stormwater runoff.*

Sustainable Design & Water Quality

AIA Position

By diverting rainfall from reaching permeable soil and channeling it to stormwater runoff, buildings and their appurtenant structures make significant contributions of contaminants to water bodies across the Nation. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) advocates the extensive use of “green infrastructure”- e.g. green roofs, permeable pavement, park lands, swales, buffer areas- to reduce stormwater runoff during heavy rainfall events. The AIA also supports the creation of incentives to build and retrofit buildings and communities so as to minimize their contribution to water quality degradation.

Actions Sought

The AIA supports amending the Clean Water Act to tighten regulatory controls on stormwater sources of water pollution. In particular, the AIA supports amendments to the Act’s State Revolving Fund to encourage Fund recipients to use federal monies to build green infrastructure.

Explanation and Justification

From its enactment in 1972, the Clean Air Water Act (CWA) has been extremely effective in bringing the waters of the United States back from a condition of severe industrial pollution from major point source discharges. To date, however, mechanisms for cleaning up stormwater discharges – particularly urban runoff, have not been successful. Stormwater channeled through city streets picks up oil, grease, animal matter and many other contaminants as it flows to the nearest river, stream or bay.

Surges of stormwater during heavy rainfall events also overwhelm combined storm and sanitary sewer systems in major metropolitan areas and result in the diversion of both untreated stormwater and sewage into rivers and estuaries. Reduction in stormwater volumes directed to these systems would ameliorate the severity of combined system overflows during these rainfall events.

At the same time, communities across the Nation are drawing down groundwater aquifers much faster than they can be recharged by rainfall events. The proliferation of urban development and sprawl also has covered former open space with impediments to the rainwater infiltration necessary to recharge these aquifers.

The AIA and its members are committed to moving the Nation in the direction of sustainable economic growth. The AIA strongly supports incentives to the recipients

of CWA funding to channel rainwater into the ground, recharging aquifers and reducing the adverse impacts of allowing stormwater to overwhelm combined sewer systems and add contaminants to already stressed aquatic ecosystems.

Diminished water quality and water availability are significant emerging environmental issues that require the attention of 110th Congress. The AIA seeks to extend its assistance regarding the water impacts contributed by the built environment as lawmakers craft solutions to these challenges.