



Myths and Misconceptions

The idea of treating stormwater as a resource and not as a waste product and the subsequent push for the adoption of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) is a relatively new concept. Not surprisingly, the explosion of literature and information coupled with the initial discovery process of figuring out what works (and what doesn't) many misunderstandings about BMPs and their efficacy have surfaced in both the regulatory and general community. Here we attempt to clarify some of the more common myths and misconceptions associated with stormwater BMPs and related concepts and present some suggestions for resolving or dissolving the barriers they create along the path to implementation.

Myth: There are limits to where BMPs can be used.

Fact: BMPs can be adapted to support any water quality, quantity or community improvement goals while accommodating cost and space requirements.

Challenge: Evaluate the needs of your particular project or installation and determine what your water quality, water quantity, and amenity goals are. The key is to find the practice (or combination of practices) that will be most effective for your site and adapt them to meet your goals and constraints.

Myth: BMPs create open and standing water, which are a health and safety hazard.

Fact: Stormwater BMPs, when designed and implemented effectively, can reduce the risk of standing water. Installing an ecoroof, for example, can result in less standing water than using a more traditional tar or asphalt roof.

Challenge: Listen to the safety concerns of all stakeholder groups and take the time to explain or amend your design to address each issue. Be sure to include people with adequate expertise to design a system that will function as intended and include adequate safety features to reduce potential safety hazards. Having a well developed maintenance plan is also essential and should be included in your development process.

Myth: BMPs are unsightly and detract from the value of my community.

Fact: BMPs designed correctly and maintained throughout their lifetime can increase property values and community appeal, preserve open space and provide amenity to the surrounding community.

Challenge: Installations should be designed with the values and aesthetic of the community in mind. It is also essential to have a maintenance and evaluation plan to ensure that the site remains viable and attractive and functions as designed.

Myth: BMPs are not allowed in my area.

Fact: BMP implementation is actually encouraged in many areas and these practices are gaining in popularity across the country.

Challenge: If BMPs are met with resistance or confusion, encourage a discussion of your intentions and the opportunities that BMPs present. Resistance may only stem from a reluctance to try something new

or to make large or undefined changes to established policy. Start by introducing small changes or minor modifications and be sure to address the concerns of all stakeholder groups as you proceed.

Myth: Trying to include BMPs into my project will slow down the process and increase development costs.

Fact: Many municipalities are altering regulations and permitting procedures to provide added incentives for including BMPs into development plans including streamlined submittal requirements and assistance with plan development.

Challenge: If your municipality does not offer such incentives, it is often possible to introduce small or minor modifications to site plans to include BMP features. An open discussion of concerns and options may also ease the transition to BMP implementation.

Myth: BMPs are not cost-effective.

Fact: BMPs are often more economically feasible than traditional stormwater infrastructure and have been adopted in many areas for this reason. BMPs that reduce site runoff reduce the need for standard structural elements (such as pipes and drainage culverts), mitigating installation and maintenance costs. The use of BMPs may increase the number of funding opportunities or pool of resources available as some institutions offer special financial opportunities for BMP implementation and it is often possible to partner with other agencies or organizations when developing projects that address stormwater management issues. BMPs may also provide benefits that are difficult to quantify, such as preservation of open space or aesthetic appeal.

Challenge: Use available data on BMP costs and effectiveness – either published data from other areas or data collected from local demonstration projects or permanent installations – to estimate cost-value benefits of using BMPs in your installation. Consider ways of expanding the pool of available resources by seeking alternate funding sources or by partnering with other groups.

Myth: There is no way to prove that BMPs will help solve my stormwater needs.

Fact: The number of studies evaluating BMP effectiveness is rapidly increasing and data are available for both structural and nonstructural practices. Municipalities that have incorporated BMPs as part of their standard approach are often a good source of information.

Challenge: BMPs are not a “one size fits all” option. Successful implementation in one location does not guarantee success in your area. BMPs should be chosen that address the aspect of stormwater your project is targeting and each BMP must be designed to meet the requirements of your particular project and community. Demonstration projects and partnerships with experienced designers and installation experts can increase the likelihood of success.

Myth: BMPs can solve all of my stormwater needs.

Fact: Sustainable stormwater practices can provide benefits to water quality, water quantity or amenity – or a combination of the three. They will not necessarily resolve all problems a stormwater control installation must address.

Challenge: BMPs can be used in isolation or with other, more traditional, practices to fully address the particular needs of a location. As specific needs are addressed, look to green practices first to see if they can provide all, or part, of your need. Adding an ecoroof or rain garden, for example, may reduce the quantity of runoff from a site, therefore reducing the need for handling the full volume of runoff.