

**“Water, water, everywhere...” (And what you can or can’t do about it)**  
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This past winter of 2002 and 2003 has been extremely wet, with frequent saturating rains. Although we’ve not had severe hurricane events that rise to national notoriety, the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) have received many, many drainage inquiries and requests for maintenance and advice from residents throughout Hanover County. Water runoff from adjoining properties can be a private or public matter. Here is a description of what assistance Hanover County’s Department of Public Works and VDOT can provide, our limitations of authority and resources, and other agencies that also help resolve commonly reported problems.

**Assistance Hanover County’s Department of Public Works Can Provide:** Hanover County’s “Drainage Easement Maintenance” policy allows limited funding for maintenance of drainage channels and storm sewer systems. Such channels and systems must be located in recorded Hanover County Drainage Easements, and funding is restricted to clearing major blockages and to correcting areas of severe erosion. DPW staff available to perform maintenance is limited, and work is prioritized based on staff resources and the severity of the problem. During normal weather conditions, DPW can usually provide maintenance within 2-3 weeks after the problem is evaluated by one of our Engineers, but the backlog of drainage problems with this winter and spring season will cause this time period to be longer. We do not have staff dedicated solely to this service, and utilize our Engineering staff to screen initial calls while also performing other duties such as reviewing development plans, building permits, and managing construction projects. Citizens should call 365-6181, and expect an Engineer to respond to their call to discuss details of location and severity, within 2 working days of the initial inquiry.

**Assistance Hanover County’s Department of Public Works Cannot Provide:** DPW does not have the authority to clear blockages in natural streams or in channels not in recorded Hanover County Drainage Easements. DPW will not routinely remove dumped or accumulated leaves and yard waste from those areas as a service. In general, natural streams and drainage channels cannot be filled in or altered to accommodate a private property owner’s desire for a dry yard. If private property owners fill their lot, or divert or block the natural flow of surface drainage, they are responsible for their actions. Such activity may harm an adjacent property owner. These issues are private civil matters which must be resolved by the owners or other affected parties. DPW may provide

guidance as a courtesy, but can take no action to correct these types of problems caused by private property owners.

**Assistance the Virginia Department of Transportation Can Provide:** VDOT maintains culvert pipes under public roadways as well as roadside ditch systems. Flooding of roadways during rainfall events should be reported to the VDOT, Ashland Residency at 752-5511. It is difficult to address road flooding during rainfall events, and VDOT will schedule maintenance to be done during the dry summer months along Hanover County's road systems. Private driveway culvert pipes are usually located in VDOT's roadside ditch system, but are only cleared when blockages cause standing water on the road surface or when citizens request maintenance. VDOT will also dig out roadside ditches, but only along the frontage of the citizen's property that makes the request.

**Standing Water on Private Property; Wetland Areas and Flood Plains:** No County agency has the authority nor have we been provided the resources to dig new ditches or provide storm sewer pipe systems to remove standing water on private property or to drain wetlands located on private property. Flood plain areas are designated on subdivision plats and individual lot plans that were recorded after County review. Prospective purchasers should ensure the lot has been properly subdivided after review by County DPW, Planning, Public Utilities and Hanover Health Dept., or should set appointments with each of these applicable Departments prior to purchase. We have received several complaints of standing water over residential septic fields. Property owners may consider installing a new septic drain field on portions of their property that are not prone to standing water. The Health Department can assist you with the proper permit. Or gently re-grading the topsoil of the existing septic drain field or installing a "French drain" to divert water may be useful. The Hanover County Health Department's Environmental Health Division provides advice as to necessary repairs and preferred locations of new septic drain fields. The Health Department can be reached by calling 365-4343. Citizens may also contract with Approved Onsite Soil Evaluators who can evaluate their property against today's more stringent regulations protecting groundwater supplies from septic drain fields.

**Prospective purchasers:** Purchasers of undeveloped lots or parcels should schedule a meeting with one of our Engineers to find out about permitting requirements for construction and/or clearing that may be desired. Prospective purchasers of any property including streams, drainage channels, swales (shallow ditches) or low areas should contact DPW and meet with an Engineer prior to the purchase. Development may be limited by the Chesapeake Bay, Flood Plain and Erosion Control regulations that are locally administered, as well as by federal wetland protection regulations. Building

permit plot plans should show all topography, swales and channels that exist on the lot, and a grading plan providing for proper drainage away from foundations, prepared by a qualified professional chosen by the applicant. An erosion and sediment control plan, including appropriate environmental studies and wetland delineation by a qualified consultant, along with fees and bonds, is required for just about all construction, except a single-family home in a new subdivision.

**Mosquito Control:** Hanover County does not provide mosquito control through spraying or application of larvicides. Private property owners may purchase and apply larvicides to areas of standing water, and are encouraged to review the recommendation's for personal protection and property maintenance found on the following web sites: [www.vdh.state.va.us](http://www.vdh.state.va.us), [www.mosquito-va.org/index.html](http://www.mosquito-va.org/index.html), [www.cdd.gov](http://www.cdd.gov), [www.epa.gov/pesticides/](http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/).

In summary, you cannot assume that the County or VDOT can address all drainage issues that affect your property. These are complex issues, for which public agencies may be able to provide guidance, but not always a resolution. We appreciate this opportunity to clarify our policies regarding drainage issues. For more information, call DPW at 365-6181.