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Did you ever think about what happens when it rains? Water drops hit the ground, and, depending on where they land, either soak into the ground or runoff into lakes, rivers, and bays. But have you ever considered what is traveling with that stormwater as it runs off the ground?

The next time you are in a parking lot or walking down a road, look down at the pavement. You'll probably see oil and antifreeze, dirt and dust, and litter, among other things. When it rains, stormwater washes these and other pollutants off the pavement and into storm sewers, which then run into surface waters where we boat, swim, fish, and sometimes get our drinking water. It is for this reason that stormwater runoff is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

The more land area that is paved over, the less opportunity exists for stormwaters to soak into the ground and these pollutants filtered out. Luckily, technology exists that help us treat the stormwater produced by paved areas. The plants in stormwater wetlands help treat stormwater runoff before it makes its way to a creek or lake. You can see a stormwater wetland in action in the parking lot of Hank Aaron Stadium. Rain gardens are similar to stormwater wetlands, but they stay dry most of the time.

Another stormwater technology is permeable pavement. These types of paving allow for stormwater to soak into the ground while still allowing us to drive and park our cars. The University of South Alabama Mitchell Center overflow parking area and the Ladd-Peebles Stadium parking lot are two local examples of a plastic grid system planted with grass. Other paved surfaces can be permeable as well. The city of Fairhope used permeable concrete for the sidewalk outside the Justice Center. Although it looks like a

rough surface, the sidewalk is smooth enough for bicycling, and allows rainwater to soak into the ground.

You can use permeable pavement for your home driveway or front walk. You can also help reduce stormwater runoff by minimizing other pavement around your home, using a rain barrel to capture rainwater for irrigation, and by washing your car in the yard or at a car wash, instead of the driveway.