



Down in the Gutter

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Imagine a heavy downpour: rain pounding on the roof; torrents spilling over the edge of the roof onto the ground below; water and mud washing out to the street and down the storm drain. At least in Southern California we want to minimize the runoff of mud and debris because as the little signs on the storm drains warn, "Do Not Dump: Drains to the Ocean."



This brings us to roof gutters and downspouts. If you are lucky, your home has been equipped to capture and direct rain flows away from sensitive areas, such as over various flowerbeds, entryways, and garage doorways. The water flows through the gutter and down the downspouts into the landscape area drains (if you are lucky enough to have underground drains installed).

If you do not have gutters and drains, it is time to think about having them installed. Gutters and drains play extremely important roles in keeping your house high and dry. By routing the runoff from a very large surface – your roof – away from the structure you are protecting siding, windows, doors, foundations, and topsoil. Of course, gutters aren't necessary for every house or every roof slope. Broad overhangs may cast runoff well away from the house, where proper grading and drainage can carry it away. Save your money for other rainy day projects if this is the case with your house.

Following are several guidelines to be used in the maintenance of your gutters and drains:

- Every six months conduct a visual inspection of the gutters and downspouts to be sure they are securely attached. Any missing or disconnected downspouts should be repaired or replaced immediately.
- Roof gutters and downspouts should be inspected every six months for accumulated debris and clogging, and every three months on structures where nearby trees have grown over the roof. Inspections should be performed before and after the rainy season. Trees and vines should be trimmed and maintained at least 24 inches away from gutters and roof structures.
- Remove accumulated debris from the roofs, gutters and downspouts at least every six months. Downspouts and connected drains should be flushed until they are fully



operational, once before the rainy season and at least once during the rainy season.

Note: Gutters and/or downspouts may need to be replaced prematurely after a structure has been reroofed or the building walls cleaned/painted, depending on how they are removed or handled during the roofing or wall operations.

- Inspect the entire drainage system annually in the fall prior to the rainy season to assure that it is properly functioning. Flush the area drain system as necessary.
- Inspect graded slopes to area drains every six months to assure proper drainage. Be sure a two percent slope for the first five feet is maintained from all structures in landscaped areas.
- Conduct quarterly inspections of the area drains to make sure the protective drain covers are in place and free from debris. Replace broken, damaged or missing area drain covers immediately as required.



If you don't do it, this could happen:

- Clogged and damaged gutters and downspouts can cause significant quantities of water to back up. This can accumulate on building surfaces, overflow into common areas, and possibly into the residences, causing leaks.
- Water accumulation can lead to stucco discoloration, mold, algae growth and damage to building materials.
- Area flooding from blocked drains can drown plants and cause root rot, prematurely killing the plant. This can require its early removal as well as replacement costs.
- Weather and plant growth can alter the grade of slopes toward the drains, causing pooling and inadequate drainage.

It is important for the welfare of your house that its "feet" are kept dry, so to speak. Water intrusion through windows and foundations is one of the most common causes of construction defect litigation today. Maintaining a properly functioning gutter and drain system goes a long way to warding off future problems.