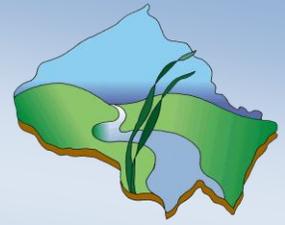


Water Quality Protection Charge Frequently Asked Questions



Jump to Your Topic:

- [Basics and History](#)
- [Rates and Calculation](#)
- [Detached Houses & Townhomes](#)
- [Condo and Multi-Family Properties](#)
- [Non-Residential Properties](#)
- [Agricultural Properties](#)
- [Nonprofit Properties](#)
- [Appeals, Hardship Exemptions & the 2013 Phase-In Program](#)
- [Credits](#)

Basics and History

What is the Water Quality Protection Charge?

The Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) is a line item on Montgomery County property tax bills. Property owners receive the WQPC with their annual property tax bill in mid-summer.

What does the WQPC Fund?

The WQPC funds many of the County's clean water initiatives including:

- Restoration of polluted and eroded streams
- Storm drain cleaning and maintenance
- Water quality and wildlife habitat protection
- Stream monitoring
- Litter control programs
- Stormwater facility maintenance
- Upgrades to stormwater ponds
- Rebates on installation of stormwater management systems ([RainScapes program](#))

Who Pays the WQPC?

All property owners in Montgomery County pay the WQPC. Applicable state law only exempts property that is owned by a local government, a volunteer fire department, or by the state government (see Section 4-202-1 (e) (2) of the Environment Article of the Maryland Code). All other property, whether residential or nonresidential, is subject to the Charge under Section 19-35 of the County Code.

How Can I See My WQPC Bill?

[View your WQPC calculation online.](#) You may also see the charge at the [Online Property Tax Bill](#) web site.

Why does the County have the WQPC?

As the County has become more developed, we've replaced our natural landscapes with asphalt, concrete, buildings and roadways. Before development, when it rained or snow, the resulting water would be naturally absorbed into the soil or flow over the ground to a nearby stream. Development has disrupted this natural cycle of water flow.

Paved surfaces are impermeable (not allowing water to pass through), so any rainwater now has to flow over surfaces and into storm drains. Large amounts of water runoff flows over the surface, picking up trash, oils and other pollutants.

We call this phenomenon **stormwater runoff**.

Most stormwater runoff flows through nearby storm drains directly to our local streams. Fast moving stormwater picks up sediment and pollution that damage healthy streams, and threaten private property, with toppled trees, eroded banks and polluted waters.

Further, many sewer lines have been exposed by erosion and in need of frequent, costly repairs. Stormwater has been extremely damaging to the health of streams, rivers and the Chesapeake Bay.

The WQPC funds projects to repair damage to our streams and infrastructure and reduce the future effects of stormwater runoff. Effective stormwater management is a positive benefit to all who live and work in the County.

What is the History of the WQPC?

The Early Years

In 2002, the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) along with citizens, work groups, and the County Council, developed the Water Quality Protection Charge to fund the maintenance of stormwater management facilities and alleviate the dangerous impacts of stormwater pollution.

From 2003-2012, all residential properties and approximately 40% of non-residential properties including non-profit organizations, places of worship and private schools paid the WQPC.

Montgomery County Permits

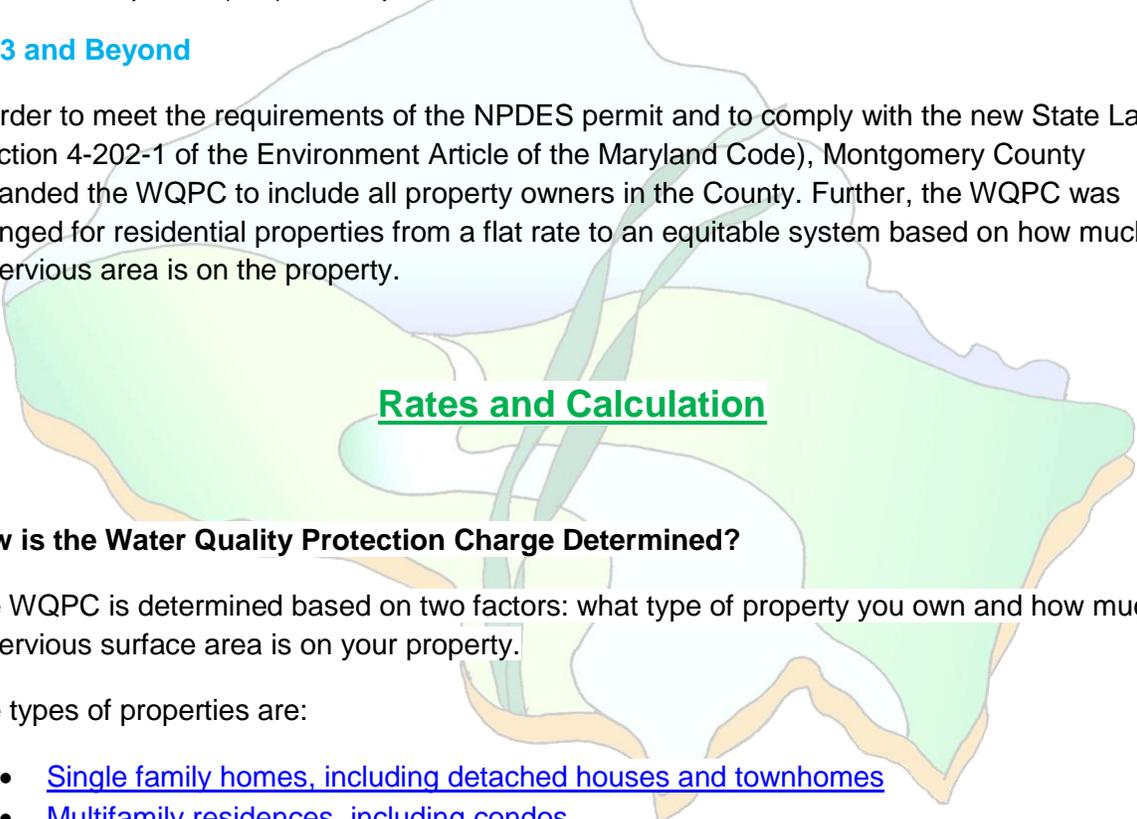
Montgomery County is responsible to both the state of Maryland and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to meet water quality standards. The EPA's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater regulations require large urban jurisdictions, such as Montgomery County, to control stormwater pollution.

The Maryland Department of Environment began issuing NPDES municipal stormwater permits in 1993 and updates them every 5 years. In 2010, Montgomery County was issued its latest permit which required a large increase in the amount of stormwater treated.

Accordingly, the WQPC has been expanded to fund the new permit requirements. This includes initiatives such as stream restoration projects, stormwater pond retrofits, stream monitoring, low impact development (LID) techniques, storm drains, and outreach and education.

2013 and Beyond

In order to meet the requirements of the NPDES permit and to comply with the new State Law (Section 4-202-1 of the Environment Article of the Maryland Code), Montgomery County expanded the WQPC to include all property owners in the County. Further, the WQPC was changed for residential properties from a flat rate to an equitable system based on how much impervious area is on the property.



Rates and Calculation

How is the Water Quality Protection Charge Determined?

The WQPC is determined based on two factors: what type of property you own and how much impervious surface area is on your property.

The types of properties are:

- [Single family homes, including detached houses and townhomes](#)
- [Multifamily residences, including condos](#)
- [Nonresidential properties](#), including businesses, office building and religious institutions
- [Agricultural properties](#)
- [Properties owned by 501\(c\)\(3\) organizations](#)

How Does the County Calculate My Property's Impervious Surface Area?

Impervious surface data was gathered from imagery through geographic information systems (GIS) available from Montgomery County and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning

Commission. To view the aerial image of your property that was used to determine your Charge, [go to the View Your Bill page](#).

What Counts as Impervious Surface Area?

Impervious areas are any surfaces which don't allow rain water or melting snow to be absorbed into the ground. The impervious surfaces of your property used to calculate the WQPC include:

- Roof area
- Patio area
- Attached or detached garage roof area
- Walkways
- Driveways
- Basketball/tennis courts
- Private parking lots
- Other paved areas, such as concrete or asphalt

Not included in the WQPC are:

- Pools (Patios and paved areas around the pool are included)
- Wooden decks
- Front porches
- Public sidewalks
- Agricultural business buildings such as barns or silos.
- Agricultural driveways or walkways

Why is My Gravel Driveway Counted as Impervious?

The Department follows the definitions included in the [Stormwater Design Manual published by the Maryland Department of the Environment](#) when determining what constitutes an impervious surface. According to the Design Manual, brick surfaces are impervious and gravel surfaces used by vehicles or heavy machinery are also impervious.

The Manual relies on studies showing that gravel and dirt areas used for vehicle access or parking have diminished moisture holding capacity and display drainage characteristics similar to asphalt or concrete. Compaction of the gravel, and the soil underneath it, significantly reduces its permeability compared to natural permeable surfaces. Therefore, even though the gravel would seem to be pervious, it actually becomes impervious.

Is My Pool Included as an Impervious Surface?

Montgomery County does not include the area of the pool containing water in the WQPC calculations. Only the paved area around the pool, such as the patio, would be included in the WQPC.

I Have Permeable Pavement for My Driveway but that Area was Still Included in My WQPC. Why?

Stormwater treatment devices such as permeable pavement and risers are included as part of impervious surfaces because they were developed land. However, property owners can use them to apply for credit (or reduction) off the WQPC.

My Block Doesn't Have Storm Drains. Why Should I Pay the WQPC?

Water does not need to flow through storm drains to become stormwater pollution. Rain water can pick up trash, pollutants and oils while flowing over driveways and other paved surfaces and then flow directly into streams. Furthermore, development and paved surfaces prevents water from being naturally absorbed into the ground, creating large amounts of runoff that flow quickly into our streams causing erosion and flood conditions. Stormwater is a major problem in urban and suburban parts of the County and can be also seen in rural areas too.

What is the Basis for the WQPC?

Before calculating how much each property owner is charged, the County first determined how much impervious surface is on a typical property in Montgomery County. This number is called the Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU). Property owners would be charged based on how much more or less impervious space they have compared to the ERU.

1 ERU = 2,406 square feet of impervious surface

Each tax year the County Council sets how much each ERU will cost. This number is called the Rate.

For 2013 Tax Year, the Rate is \$88.40.

1 ERU = 2,406 square feet = \$88.40

To see how, your WQPC is calculated, go to the section that most fits what type of property owner you are:

- [Detached house or townhome](#)
- [Multifamily residential and condo](#)
- [Nonresidential property](#)
- [Agricultural property](#)
- [501\(c\)\(3\) property owner](#)

Were There Any Changes to the WQPC for the 2013 Tax Year?

The 2013 Tax Year had three major changes:

- It was the first year that all property owners received the Water Quality Protection Charge.
- [A Phase-In.](#) Due to the expansion of the WQPC, many nonresidential properties will receive the WQPC for the first time, and for a small percentage of residential owners, their Charge will increase over last year. To lessen the burden and for budgeting purposes, any increases in the WQPC due to the expansion will be phased-in over three years.
- [A Credit Program.](#) The new law also established a credit program which reduces the WQPC up to 50% for property owners who own and maintain stormwater management practices.

I Own Multiple Properties. Can I Combine the Properties Together for the Purposing of Calculating the WQPC?

Yes. Property owners can apply for combining contiguous (no separation such as a road between properties) single-owner property accounts into one. Petition the Director of the Department of Environmental Protection for an adjustment by submitting a written request [as an appeal](#).

If the property spans multiple tax accounts, you can appeal to have the separate accounts combined into one for the purposes of calculating the WQPC. If you would like to submit an appeal, please fill out the form above.

Detached House and Townhome Properties

What Qualifies as a Detached House and a Townhome?

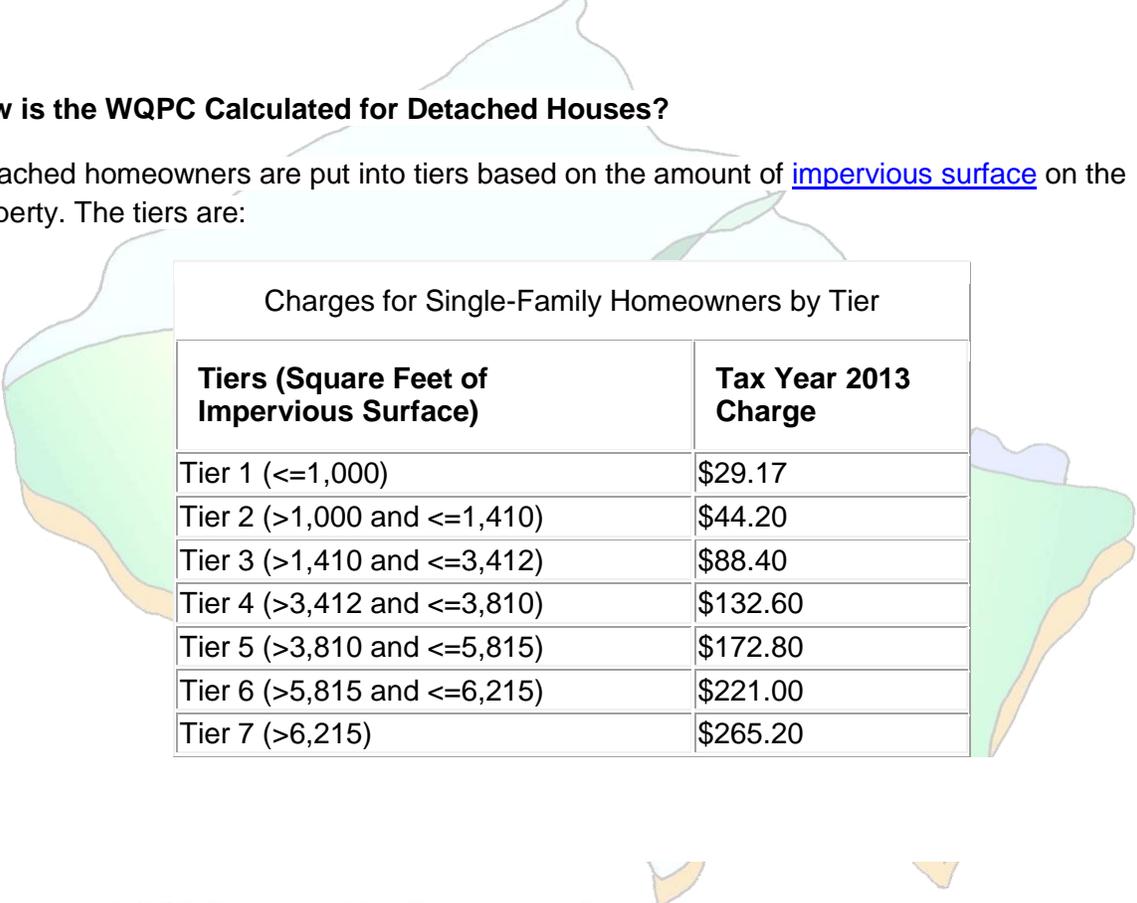
A detached home is a free-standing residence that does not share a wall with another property.

A townhome, also known as a rowhouse or attached house, is a semi-detached property that shares at least one wall with another property.

[Condos](#) and [agricultural properties](#) have their own charge structure.

How is the WQPC Calculated for Detached Houses?

Detached homeowners are put into tiers based on the amount of [impervious surface](#) on the property. The tiers are:



Tiers (Square Feet of Impervious Surface)	Tax Year 2013 Charge
Tier 1 (<=1,000)	\$29.17
Tier 2 (>1,000 and <=1,410)	\$44.20
Tier 3 (>1,410 and <=3,412)	\$88.40
Tier 4 (>3,412 and <=3,810)	\$132.60
Tier 5 (>3,810 and <=5,815)	\$172.80
Tier 6 (>5,815 and <=6,215)	\$221.00
Tier 7 (>6,215)	\$265.20

How is the WQPC Calculated for Townhomes?

Townhomes are put into tiers based on the amount of [impervious surface](#) on the property.

A major difference between townhomes and detached homes is that townhomes share a lot of their impervious spaces with their neighbors. A townhome may have shared parking lots, walkways, and recreational areas, in addition to, the roofs being connected. It can be difficult to define property lines.

In order to calculate each townhome's WQPC, the County combines the square footage of all the shared impervious areas and then divides it by the number of property owners. On top of the

resulting number, you would add any private impervious areas, such as a private patio or basketball court.

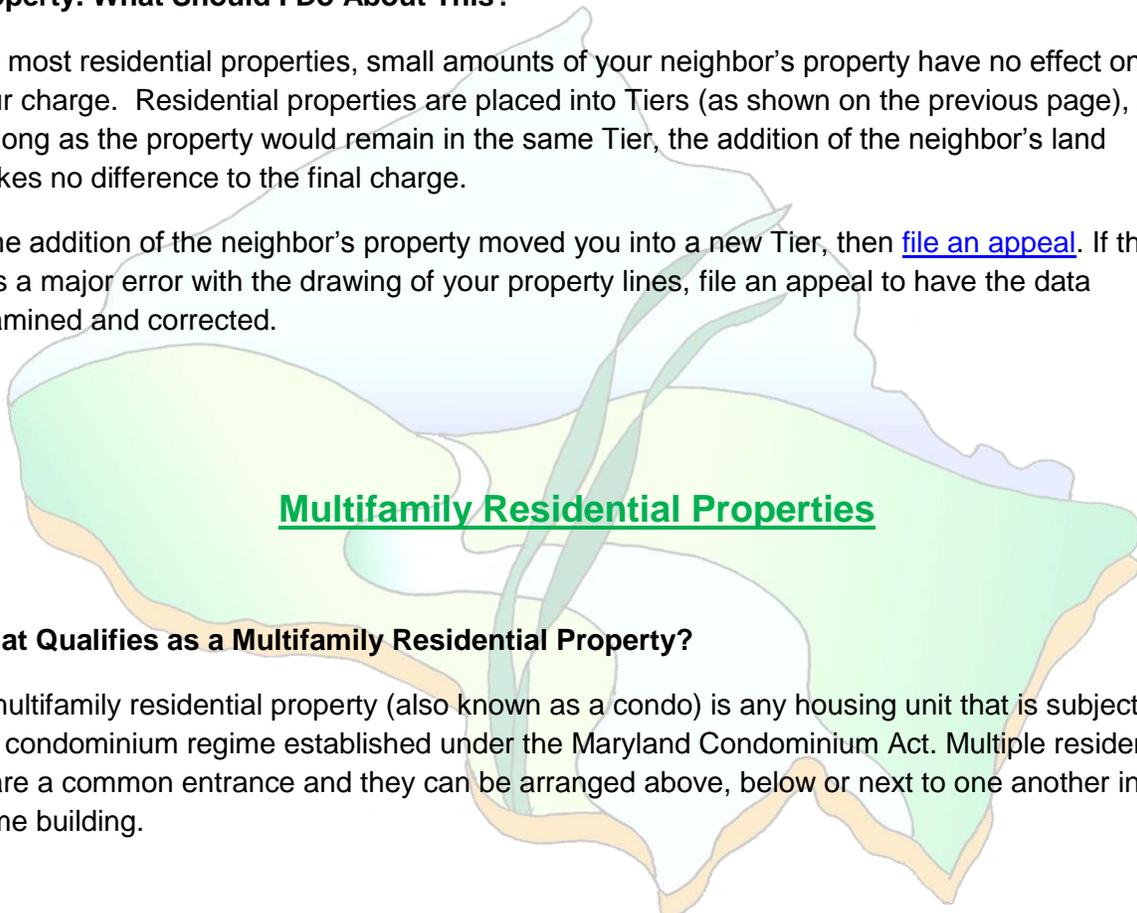
Once you have the final impervious area for each townhome, compare it to the tier chart on the previous page to figure out the charge.

[View an example of how to calculate a townhome WQPC on the website.](#)

My Property Lines Were Not Drawn Correctly and Include Some of My Neighbor's Property. What Should I Do About This?

For most residential properties, small amounts of your neighbor's property have no effect on your charge. Residential properties are placed into Tiers (as shown on the previous page), so as long as the property would remain in the same Tier, the addition of the neighbor's land makes no difference to the final charge.

If the addition of the neighbor's property moved you into a new Tier, then [file an appeal](#). If there was a major error with the drawing of your property lines, file an appeal to have the data examined and corrected.



What Qualifies as a Multifamily Residential Property?

A multifamily residential property (also known as a condo) is any housing unit that is subject to the condominium regime established under the Maryland Condominium Act. Multiple residences share a common entrance and they can be arranged above, below or next to one another in the same building.

How is the WQPC Calculated for Multi-family Residential Properties?

To calculate the WQPC for each condo owner within a multi-family residential property, follow these steps:

1. Determine the total [impervious surface area](#) for the entire property. This includes the parking area, private driveways, walking areas, patio, roof, etc.
2. Determine the number of condos within the building.
3. Divide the total impervious surface area for the property by the number of condos.

4. Add that number to this formula:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{The WQPC}$$

All property owners in the multi-family residential property pay the same WQPC.

[View an example of how to calculate a multifamily residential WQPC on the website.](#)

Nonresidential Properties

What Qualifies as a Nonresidential Property?

There are several types of properties that classify as nonresidential:

- Commercial properties such as office buildings, hotels, retail establishments or industrial properties such as factories and warehouses.
- Properties owned by homeowner associations, not-for-profit entities such as religious institutions, healthcare facilities, other developed properties devoted to non-governmental charitable and institutional uses, and any government-owned properties subject to the WQPC.

Properties owned by 501(c)(3) organizations are NOT classified as nonresidential properties and have a separate [WQPC structure](#).

How is the WQPC Calculated for Nonresidential Properties?

Determine the total [impervious surface](#) area of the property. This calculation includes the roof, paved areas, parking lots, patios, etc. Put the final number in the formula below to determine your WQPC:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{WQPC}$$

[View an example of how to calculate a nonresidential WQPC on the website.](#)

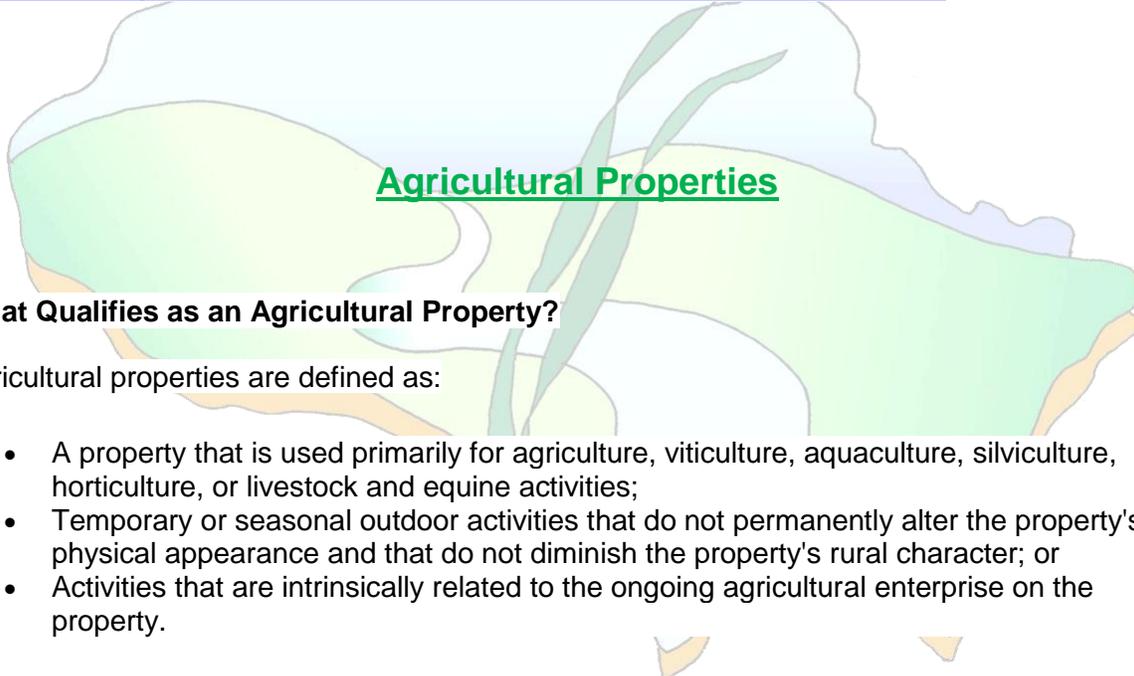
My Business is One of Several Storefronts in a Mixed-Use Building. How is My WQPC Calculated?

Nonresidential properties that share at least one wall with another property calculate their WQPC differently. They must follow these steps:

1. Determine the amount of shared [impervious areas](#) for the property. This can include the shared roof, driveway or parking lots.
2. Divide the total shared impervious areas by the number of units. This is your property's portion of the shared impervious area.
3. Determine any private impervious area for your property, such as a private patio.
4. Add together your portion of the shared impervious area to the total amount of private area.
5. Place number received in Step 4 to this formula:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{WQPC}$$

[View an example of how to calculate a nonresidential WQPC on the website.](#)



What Qualifies as an Agricultural Property?

Agricultural properties are defined as:

- A property that is used primarily for agriculture, viticulture, aquaculture, silviculture, horticulture, or livestock and equine activities;
- Temporary or seasonal outdoor activities that do not permanently alter the property's physical appearance and that do not diminish the property's rural character; or
- Activities that are intrinsically related to the ongoing agricultural enterprise on the property.

How is the WQPC Calculated for Agricultural Properties?

Determine the total impervious surface is on the property. This is the square footage of the roof area of the residence. Put the final number in the formula below to determine your WQPC:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{WQPC}$$

[View an example of how to calculate an agricultural WQPC on the website.](#)

What Impervious Surfaces are Included for Agricultural Properties?

Agricultural properties are not charged for any impervious surfaces related to the business. They are only charged for impervious surfaces on any residential properties located on the land. This is limited to the roof area.

501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations

What Qualifies as an 501(c)(3) Property?

To be calculated as a part of the 501(c)(3) charge structure, a property must be owned by a IRS designated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Other types of nonprofits, such as recreational clubs or certain religious institutions, are not registered with the IRS as a 501(c)(3) organization, and therefore, would be charged based on the type of property (residential or nonresidential).

How is the WQPC Calculated for 501(c)(3) Nonprofits?

To calculate the charge for properties owned by 501(c)(3) nonprofits, follow these steps:

1. Determine the amount of impervious surface on the property. Total the roof area, parking lots, driveways and other impervious areas.
2. Add the total impervious area for your property into this formula:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{WQPC}$$

3. Compare the calculated WQPC from the formula above to the chart below. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations have a maximum on how much they will be charged. If your calculated WQPC from the formula above is more than the maximum for your tier, then you will only be charged the maximum.

Tiers (Amount of Impervious Surface in square feet)	Tax Year 2013 Charge
Tier 1 (<=6,910)	No more than \$132.60
Tier 2 (>6,910 and <=54,455)	No more than \$795.60
Tier 3 (>54,455)	No More than \$2,033.20

[View an example of how to calculate the WQPC for 501\(c\)\(3\) nonprofits on the website.](#)

I Manage a 501(c)(3) Organization and Our Property is One of Several Storefronts in a Mixed-Use Building. How is My WQPC Calculated?

Nonprofit properties that share at least one wall with another property calculate their WQPC differently. They must follow these steps:

1. Determine the amount of shared [impervious areas](#) for the property. This can include the shared roof, driveway or parking lots.
2. Divide the total shared impervious areas by the number of units. This is your property's portion of the shared impervious area.
3. Determine any private impervious area for your property, such as a private patio.
4. Add together your portion of the shared impervious area to the total amount of private area.
5. Place number received in Step 4 to this formula:

$$(\text{Impervious Surface Area} / 2,406) \times \$88.40 = \text{WQPC}$$

6. Compare the calculated WQPC from the formula above to the chart below. 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations have a maximum on how much they will be charged. If your calculated WQPC from the formula above is more than the maximum for your tier, then you will only be charged the maximum.

Tiers (Amount of Impervious Surface in square feet)	Tax Year 2013 Charge
Tier 1 (<=6,910)	No more than \$132.60
Tier 2 (>6,910 and <=54,455)	No more than \$795.60
Tier 3 (>54,455)	No More than \$2,033.20

I Belong to a Church Group. Are we Classified as a Nonprofit?

Only organizations designated by the IRS as 501(c)(3) organizations are eligible to have their WQPC calculated at the nonprofit rate. All other nonprofit organizations and business are charged based on the type of property (residential or nonresidential).

Appeals, Hardship Exemptions & the 2013 Phase-In

I Believe my WQPC was Calculated Incorrectly. How Do I Appeal the Charge?

If a property owner believes that the Water Quality Protection Charge (WQPC) has been assigned or calculated incorrectly, the property owner may petition the Director of the Department of Environmental Protection for an adjustment by submitting a written request, using the [appeal form](#).

When is the Deadline for Filing an Appeal to the WQPC?

Appeals must be submitted no later than September 30 of the year that the payment of the charge is due.

I Own Multiple Properties. Can I Combine the Properties Together for the Purposing of Calculating the WQPC?

Yes. Property owners can apply for combining contiguous (no separation such as a road between properties) single-owner property accounts into one. Petition the Director of the Department of Environmental Protection for an adjustment by submitting a written request, using the [appeal form](#).

If the property spans multiple tax accounts, you can appeal to have the separate accounts combined into one for the purposes of calculating the WQPC. If you would like to submit an appeal, please fill out the form above.

What is a Hardship Exemption and Who Can Apply?

A hardship exemption is where a property owner has a reduced charge due to financial limitations. To qualify for an exemption, your household income must not exceed 170% of the Federal poverty level or you must be approved for benefits under the Maryland Energy Assistance Program for the current billing year. The property owner may petition the Director of the Department of Environmental Protection for an adjustment by submitting a written request, [using the hardship exemption form](#).

Can 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Organizations Apply for an Exemption?

501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations can receive a partial exemption for the amount of the WQPC that exceeds 0.2% of the property's total revenue.

When is the Deadline for Filing a Hardship Exemption to the WQPC?

Hardship exemptions must be submitted by April 1st annually.

What is the 2013 Phase-In Program?

Due to the expansion of the WQPC, many nonresidential properties will receive the WQPC for the first time, and for a small percentage of residential owners, their charge will increase over last year. To assist with the adjustment to the WQPC, any increases in the WQPC due to the expansion will be phased-in over three years.

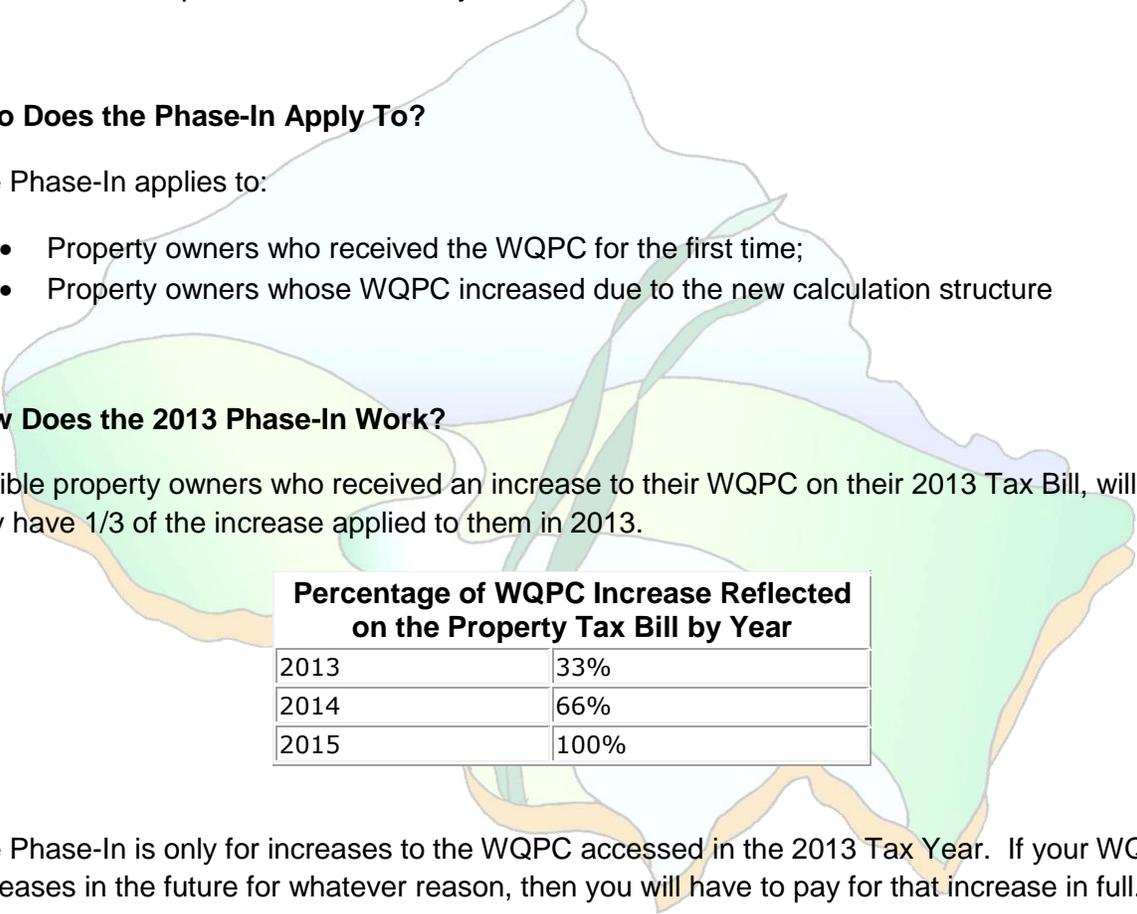
Who Does the Phase-In Apply To?

The Phase-In applies to:

- Property owners who received the WQPC for the first time;
- Property owners whose WQPC increased due to the new calculation structure

How Does the 2013 Phase-In Work?

Eligible property owners who received an increase to their WQPC on their 2013 Tax Bill, will only have 1/3 of the increase applied to them in 2013.



2013	33%
2014	66%
2015	100%

The Phase-In is only for increases to the WQPC accessed in the 2013 Tax Year. If your WQPC increases in the future for whatever reason, then you will have to pay for that increase in full.

Credit Program

What is the Credit Program?

In 2013, Montgomery County launched a Credit Program for the Water Quality Protection Charge to reward property owners who installed stormwater management practices on their

property. The Credit Program provides up to 50-60% off their WQPC for installing practices that help alleviate stormwater pollution.

How is the Amount of the Credit Determined?

The amount of the credit is based on the type of stormwater management and the volume of water treated. More intensive practices, such as wet ponds, dry ponds and bioretentions treat a lot of stormwater, and therefore, give property owners a large credit. Less intensive practices, such as rain barrels, cisterns and rain gardens, provide a smaller credit.

The goal of the credit program is to provide incentives to property owners for meeting stormwater standards which best mimic pre-developed conditions and controls and treats stormwater to the maximum extent practicable.

Detach houses and townhome properties can receive a credit up to 50% of their WQPC.

Multi-family residential properties and non-residential properties can receive a reduction of up to 50% off their WQPC for environmental site design and other stormwater management systems; and up to 60% off their charge if the entire property is treated by environmental site design alone.

How Can I Take Advantage of the Credit Program?

First, determine if you have a stormwater management practice on your property. There are many different kinds that range from small backyard practices, such as a rain garden, to large commercial building practices, such as underground storage. [View a full list of stormwater management practices.](#)

If you do not currently have a stormwater management practice, consider installing one. Residential, institutional and commercial properties can take advantage of [RainScapes Rebates](#) to help fund the cost of installing stormwater practices.

If you already have a stormwater management practice, then [complete an application to apply for a Credit.](#) To receive a credit, the stormwater management practice must meet the guidelines described below.

What are the Minimum Requirements for Receiving a Credit?

To receive the Credit, a property owner must:

- Maintain the stormwater management practice in accordance with the maintenance requirements of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

- [Fill out and submit an application.](#) Accepted applications are valid for three years. View the deadline calendar below.

What are the Deadlines to Apply for a Credit?

- 10/31/14 to receive reduction for the 2015 Tax Year
- 10/31/15 to receive reduction for the 2016 Tax Year

Deadlines will be the end of October with the credit applied the following Tax Year (bills are sent out in mid-summer).

How Do I Apply for a Credit?

Detached homes and townhomes can apply by completing [this online application](#).

Multi-family residential properties can apply by completing [this online application](#).

- Only one application needs to be completed for the condominium regime (e.g condo association). If the stormwater practice applies to all property owners within the condominium, then a list of tax accounts qualified for the credit must be included.
- If a multi-family residential or non-residential property would like DEP to perform the research and calculations necessary to receive a credit, DEP will complete the application on their behalf for 50% of the final value of the credit. For more information on DEP preparing credit applications, contact WQPC.Credits@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Non-residential properties can apply by completing [this online application](#).

- The same property owner with multiple property parcels within the same drainage area may apply to receive treatment credit for all properties in the drainage area.
- If a multi-family residential or non-residential property would like DEP to perform the research and calculations necessary to receive a credit, DEP will complete the application on their behalf for 50% of the final value of the credit. For more information on DEP preparing credit applications, contact WQPC.Credits@montgomerycountymd.gov.

For those without access to computers or who need assistance completing an application, email WQPC.Credits@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 311