The Monthly Dirt
A monthly newsletter on the California Construction General Permit

Written by guest columnist, Andrew Teravskis

Trying to predict the future of any industry is a good way to embarrass yourself: just ask former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, who made this cringey prediction in 2007... "There's no chance the iPhone will get any significant market share. No chance." But the storm water industry is unusually ripe for change— while regulations have evolved significantly since the beginnings of the storm water industry in the 1970s, the business of compliance has remained largely the same. Meanwhile, technology has steadily progressed to the point that most areas of our lives look radically different fifty years later. Unlike consumer tech or finance, the regulatory compliance world of storm water won't change because it's chasing trends. It will change for a much more ordinary reason: a changing of the guard. So, let's embarrass ourselves by trying to predict the future, shall we?

Why Change Is Inevitable

Society is already in the middle of the largest torch-passing in history. By 2048, an estimated $124 trillion will transfer from the Baby Boomer generation to Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. But the less-often discussed handoff, and the one with the most implications for the storm water industry, is the transfer of leadership.

Nearly 70% of S&P 500 executives are over the age of 60 (including the senior editor of The Monthly Dirt). *Corporate America—including the storm water industry—is approaching a period of rapid leadership turnover.* As younger decision-makers move into ownership and executive roles, they bring with them a fundamentally different relationship with technology.

These new leaders are digital-native. They expect systems to be intuitive, connected and cloud-based by default. And perhaps more importantly, they don't carry the same historical presumptions about why things are done a certain way. Workflows that feel obvious to Gen Xers and Millennials are not at all obvious to Gen Zers... and therefore, are open for reinvention.

The First Domino: Outdated Computing

Millennials like myself lived through the rise of the internet. We understand why file-and-folder-based computing exists because files had to be kept somewhere physical: CDs, thumb drives, local servers, and hard drives.

On the contrary, the life experience of the next generation has been digital and cloud-native. Information doesn't "live" in one place—it's accessible everywhere, instantly, by anyone with login credentials. So as Millennials move into leadership and Gen Z fills the workforce, the storm water industry's understanding of computing will begin to shift.

- ⇨ Documents, as we know them, will slowly phase out. SWPPPs, inspection reports, and annual reports will still be needed and created, but they won't be files as we know them. Instead, they'll exist as cloud-based objects: decentralized, always current, and available anywhere at any time. Imagine a SWPPP that behaves more like your Google Calendar app — simple to edit, instantly synced, and always up to date. A truly living document. *(After all, isn't that what our storm water forefathers foresaw?)*
- ⇨ Interfaces will change too. Instead of scrolling through a PDF with hundreds of 8.5" × 11" pages—digital replicas of analog paperwork—information will be presented contextually and nonlinearly. Any section, regulatory reference, or record will be accessible in two or three taps.
- ⇨ The distinction between desktop, tablet, and mobile will blur to the point of nonexistence. Information will be natively editable on whatever device a user happens to have in their hand.
- ⇨ Printed materials will finally give way to linkable and up-to-date digital records.

Ten years from now, managing a storm water program with binders, Word documents, and email chains will feel as outdated as the fax machine.

The Second Domino: Disconnected Systems

Today, storm water programs are managed as a collection of disconnected parts. Consider what's involved in something as routine as writing a SWPPP:

- Email chains
- Client intake forms
- Initial site inspections and photos
- Multiple draft versions
- Phone calls and text messages
- Inspection reports and PDFs
- Photo folders
- Annual reports
- SMARTS submissions

This fragmentation is a byproduct of file-based computing. Because each component is created by different people and stored in different places, reusing that information requires making copies, sometimes by manual re-entry.

But as the industry shifts toward object-based systems, these disconnected pieces can collapse into a single, unified workflow. A user will be able to enter information once and watch the platform populate the information everywhere it needs to go. All ancillary data created for the project such as photos, inspections, and reports will all be tied to the same underlying object and will be accessible anywhere.

The Last Domino: Regulatory Processes

Institutions are always the last to change. Government technology typically lags professional systems by a decade or more. (COBOL, a programming language from the 1950s, is still a backbone of many government platforms.) But eventually, regulators catch up.

Ten years from now, regulatory systems like SMARTS will likely resemble today's modern professional tools:

Check out this 2025 Storm Water Awareness Week workshop presented by Andrew Teravskis — Digital Transformation in Storm Water Compliance.

- Mobile-friendly interfaces
- Stronger security
- Reliable auto-save
- Direct integrations with inspection and SWPPP platforms

The regulatory platforms will still likely depend on files like PDFs and Word documents, but if the industry has progressed far enough, we may see these documents be treated more like snapshots, and less like working documents. In other words, the PDF you upload to SMARTS may not be treated as your site's working SWPPP but as timestamped evidence that your project has a SWPPP: because the working SWPPP will be a digital object accessible anywhere at any time.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Predicting the future always risks embarrassment. But I would argue that the real risk of predicting the future isn't getting the prediction wrong; it's failing to recognize and proactively respond to change, and instead simply reacting. We're all powerless to stop progress, but we all can take responsibility for our response as progress happens.

Talk to your junior staff—and as you're teaching them the way things are done, allow them to question why it's done that way. Seek to understand what tools excite them and why. Where possible, let curiosity guide change.

The storm water industry won't transform overnight, but ten years from now, it will look very different. These technology predictions may never come to pass, but you can take one of these predictions to the bank: in ten years, the next generation will dominate the workforce and will bring with them new perspectives and life experiences that will determine how the technology advances.

About the Guest Author

Andrew Teravskis is the founder and CEO of Storm (https://getstorm.io), a modern SWPPP writing solution for the storm water industry built around the concept of object-based cloud computing, allowing SWPPPs to truly be living documents. You can reach him at andrew@getstorm.io.

If you want to dive deeper down the rabbit hole of technological changes happening in the storm water compliance arena, check out this 2025 Storm Water Awareness Week workshop also given by Andrew— AI Slop Armageddon: Ensuring Quality and Accuracy in the Age of Automation.

Please contact us if you have any questions ...

The Monthly Dirt

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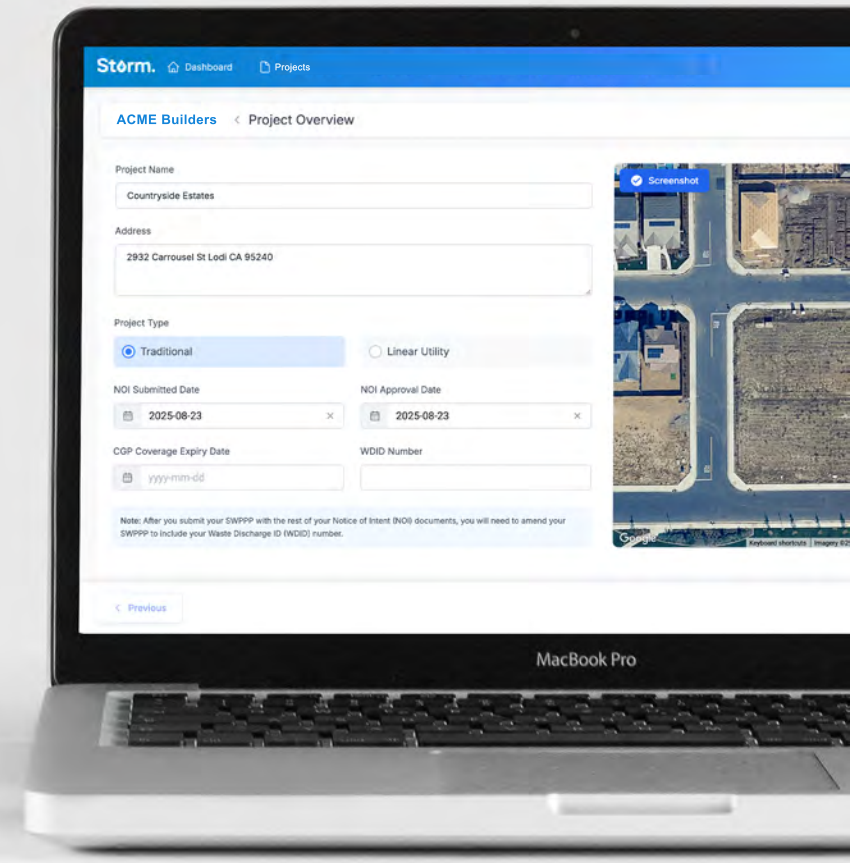

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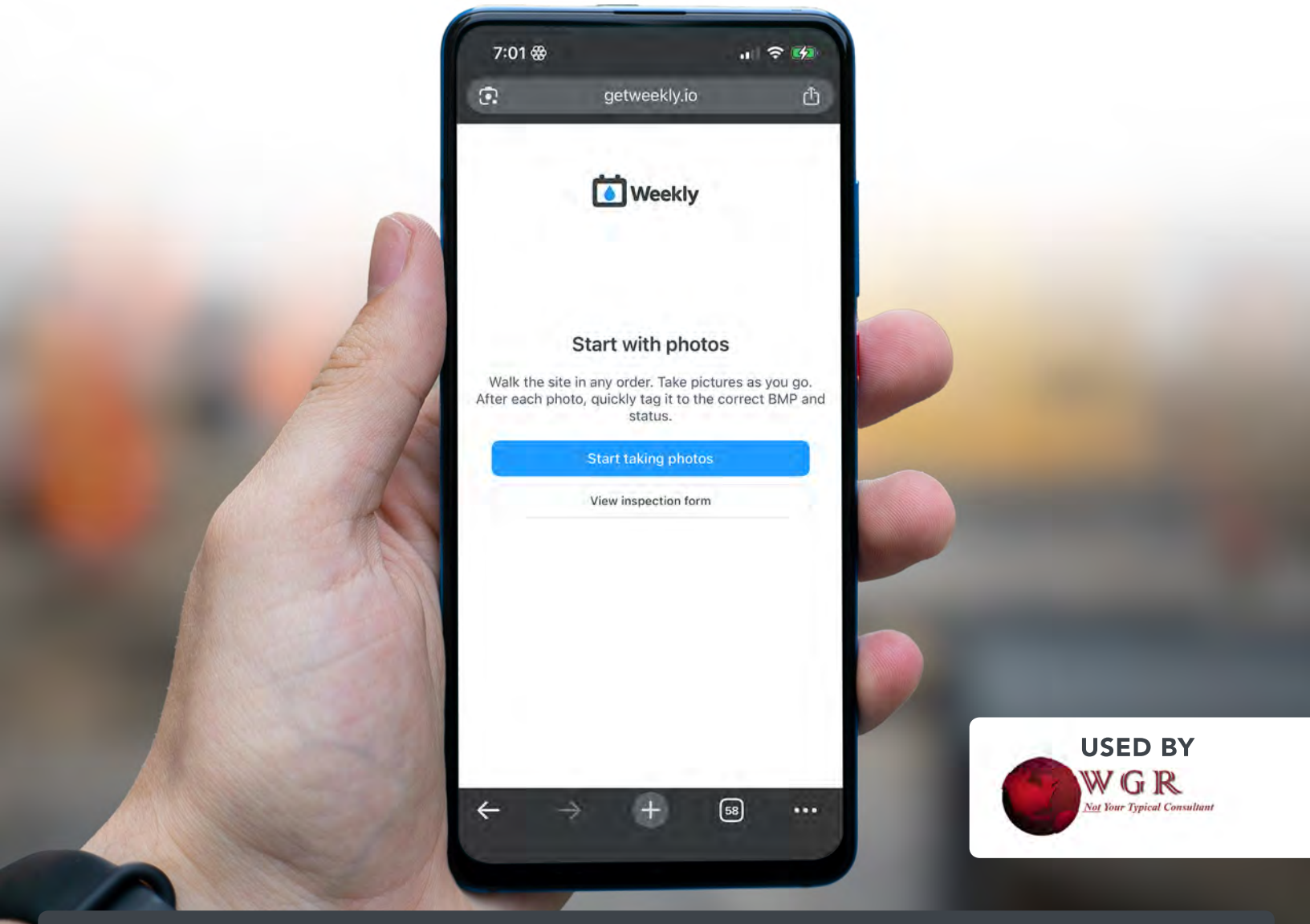

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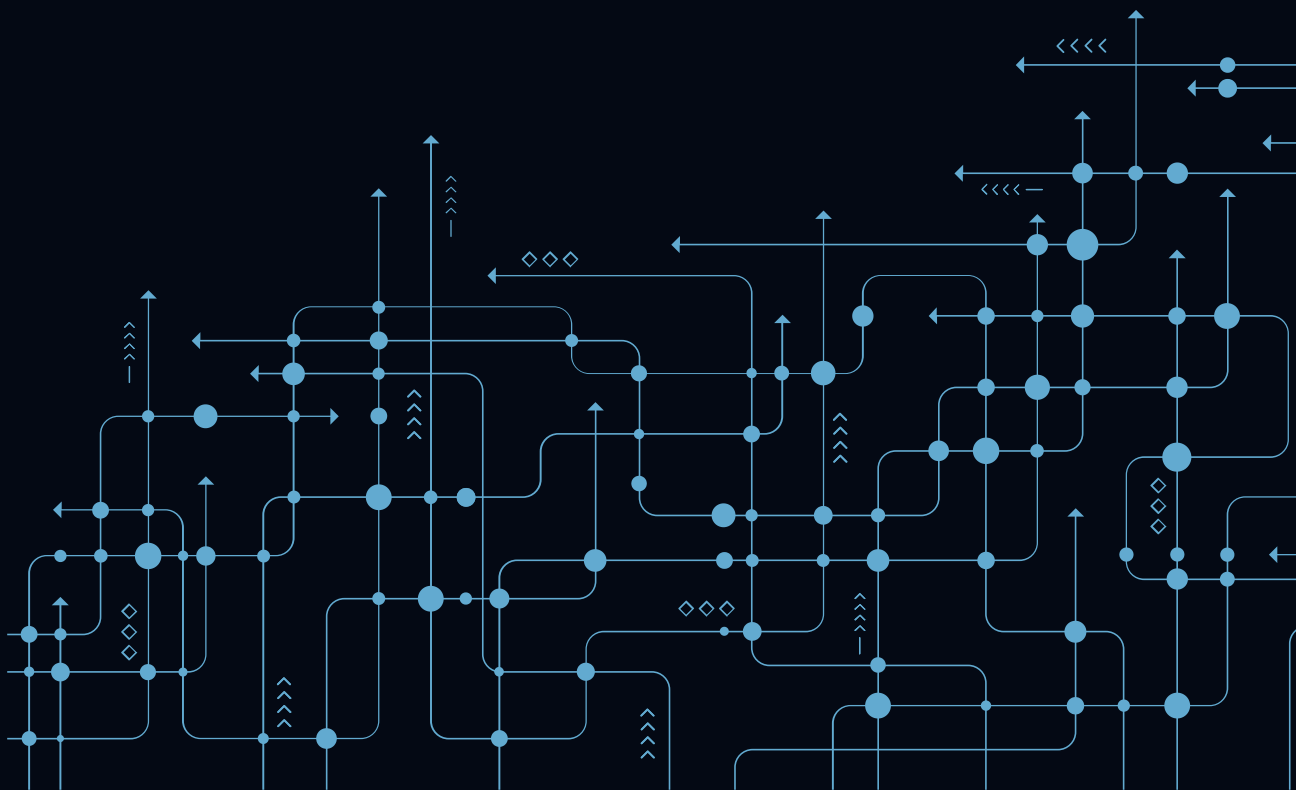

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