

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

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GENERAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Watershed management programs, especially those whose goal is to reduce nonpoint source pollution, should implement education strategies to inform residents about their role in controlling nonpoint source pollution. The people who live and work in the villages, towns and cities that make up the watershed should be targeted.

Part of WAC 4's strategy to control nonpoint source pollution is to educate the public about this form of pollution and how residents could help reduce it. WAC 4 recommends that public education initiatives teach residents about the issues and problems of nonpoint source pollution and involve them in the solutions.

The Long Island Sound watershed in Westchester County is diverse in the character of its landscape and development and of the people who live and work here. This diversity should be carefully assessed when developing an information dissemination and education strategy. An initial step in developing a public awareness program is to frame the message, determine what information about nonpoint source pollution is to be conveyed, and stress the message at every opportunity. The tone and level of complexity of the message depend on the community's composition and sophistication. The program should include concrete information about using and disposing of toxic substances in homes yards, farms, and work places.

Nonpoint source pollution affects everyone in the community. On the issue of control, business people, developers and homeowners each have an individual agenda. A public awareness program should consider these individual needs and interests. Messages and presentations should be tailored to specific groups, for example, school faculty, city employees, developers, public and private organizations, and youth groups.

The following groups should be involved in the public awareness strategy:

- local government and community leaders
- residential property owners and tenants
- civic, environmental and other public and private organizations
- business and industry leaders
- grade school and college students and faculty

The table on the following page indicates the most effective use of various public education techniques.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION TECHNIQUES
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT**

METHOD	MOST EFFECTIVE USE	RESULTS
Newsletters	Announce meeting times and dates, update information, list issues to be discussed at upcoming meeting	Public awareness
Newspaper Articles	(same as newsletter) – Provide additional detail about local stories, photos of citizen activities, feature articles provide information about problems and solutions	Public awareness
Demonstration Sites	Exhibit innovative technology, and should be accompanied by signs, brochures or permanent on-site interpretive staff	Public awareness, knowledge, understanding
Printed and Taped Material (e.g., fact sheets, videos)	Explain new technology, describe case studies, provide training information for new employees, outline facts to stakeholders	Public awareness, knowledge, understanding
Signs	Mark watershed boundaries, identify critical areas, promote specific behaviors in specific places, identify cooperators in project, explain adjacent project and its best management practices (BMPs), provide interpretive natural resources information	Public awareness, knowledge, understanding
Meetings	Share information, plan actions, evaluate process	Public awareness, knowledge, understanding, desire/ability to act
Field trips	Observe the natural resources to be protected, view installed and functioning best management practices (BMPs), learn how BMPs operate, monitor BMPs for assessment or compliance	Public awareness, knowledge, understanding, desire/ability to act
On-site Inspections	Identify problems, recommend corrective actions, evaluate effectiveness of pollution controls, identify noncompliant stakeholders, educate individuals	Action
Training	Provide new skills to stakeholders	Action
Technical Assistance	Identify problems, recommend solutions, assist with installation of BMPs, educate individuals, evaluate effectiveness of solutions	Understanding, desire/ability to act, action

Source: Terrene Institute, Clean Water In Your Watershed: A Citizen's Guide to Watershed Protection, 1991

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Because nonpoint source pollution is a continuing issue related to development and individual lifestyles, a water quality program must be established and embraced to succeed. Organization and ordinances mean nothing without community support. The community must buy in and accept the program, just as it does a sewage treatment system.

To gain support, you must understand your community. Is your community small or large? Are residents primarily retired or parents with young children? Are residents commuters or do they earn their living in the community? Do most residents stay in the community all year or seasonally? How much do residents know about nonpoint source pollution? How will they be affected by a nonpoint source management plan? How can they be expected to react to the proposed plan?

A public opinion survey or series of well-publicized public hearings throughout the watershed and in your immediate community will help you get to know the community and give you a basis for measuring public opinion.

- **Public awareness.** Public information and education are important ways to curb nonpoint source pollution, since the solution lies largely in changing individual behavior and lifestyle. An information program must educate citizens about the problem and make citizen involvement part of the solution.
- **Framing the message.** An initial step in developing a public awareness program is to frame your message. Determine what information about nonpoint source pollution you wish to convey, and stress this message at every opportunity. The tone and level of complexity of your message depend on the community's composition and sophistication. The program should include concrete information about using and disposing of toxic substances in homes, yards, farms, and workplaces.
- **Targeting the audience.** Nonpoint source pollution affects everyone in the community. On the issue of control, business people, developers, and homeowners each have an individual agenda. Make sure your public awareness program considers these individual needs and interest.

Tailor your messages and presentations to specific groups - for example, college faculty, city employees, developers, civic organizations, or youth groups. Involve environmental groups such as the Izaak Walton League, state associations of conservation districts, and other public or private organizations.

- **Reaching your audience.** A targeted public awareness campaign uses a variety of tools to convey your message and attain your goals. Some of the tools include:

- *Media.* Techniques include press releases, articles, photos with captions, talk shows, news programs, public service announcements, newsletters, and public notices to publicize your message.
- *Awards.* Broaden your visibility, recognize good work, and gain a variety of advocates for your program through conservation awards for young people, public service awards, and participation and sponsorship awards.
- *Meetings.* Use public gatherings, club meetings, special conferences, and workshops to explain your program; customize your message to the needs and interests of your audience.
- *Speakers' Bureau.* Face-to-face communication to a specialized audience provides a powerful opportunity to deliver your message, answer questions, and clarify ambiguities.
- *Educational Materials.* Brochures and posters obtained from EPA, the state water authority, or other groups can be distributed to schools, civic groups, and businesses to further support your message.

- **Using a variety of information/education tools.** The numerous techniques available to make your community aware of the nonpoint source problem and its solutions are limited only by your imagination and budget. See the following list for ideas to ensure support from the community:

- publicize your program in all possible ways - use fact sheets inserted into utility statements, as well as flyers, radio, television, newspapers, public hearings, group meetings; develop personal contacts with reporters - always offer story and photo opportunities.
- form communities to work on specific aspects of the program; include representatives from all interest groups.
- offer field trips to groups. Seeing the watershed's problem has much more impact than reading about it.
- distribute drafts of the plan to interested groups for review.
- set up meetings using existing organizations such as 4-H or Extension Service and organize community informational watershed workshop.
- involve schools - make presentations to classes or conduct field trips.
- set up nonpoint source pollution displays at every opportunity - county fairs, local Earth Day events, conferences, school events.

- **Citizen monitoring.** Environmentally conscious citizens have made great contributions to local programs nationwide. Groups such as the Chesapeake Bay Watch and the Streamwalk Committee in Seattle, Washington, have become integral parts of the water quality program. Citizen groups can collect valuable information on basic parameters - they can monitor and identify problems, collect surface water samples, and measure turbidity.

Local officials see two advantages to citizen monitoring. First, these activities are an economical way to gather high quality data. Second, citizen monitoring is a valuable tool to build grassroots interest in water quality issues. In addition to helping officials identify and avert potential water problems, citizen groups build public support for nonpoint source programs and remedial

actions, when necessary. Despite these benefits, a volunteer program needs careful handling. Everyone is not suited to be a volunteer monitor. Groups and individuals may have difficulty staying motivated throughout an entire sampling project. Inappropriate training or procedures can result in useless data. Sampling also involves a slight risk of injury; local governments must have sufficient liability insurance to cover such situations.

Consider the following recommendations concerning volunteer monitoring programs:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Citizen monitoring projects should not stand alone but should be integrated into a total water quality management program.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A qualified water quality specialist should develop the sampling design, analyze the data, and prepare the final report.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A qualified water quality specialist should train and supervise volunteers in the field, review data frequently, and work closely with the state water quality agency.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The sample design should be relatively simple and not dependent on precise measurement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteers should be carefully recruited and trained; periodic training may be necessary to replace dropouts and refresh monitoring skills of current volunteers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The water quality specialist should encourage frequent reports, personal presentations at group meetings, and media coverage to keep the group motivated.

THE MISSING LINK – COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The optimum situation - informed watershed planning to identify and correct existing problems and prevent future problems - will achieve the best environment possible. But all planning, no matter how complete, must be done *with* your community, not *for* it.

The advantages of the prevention/restoration ethic are impressive and would tempt any community - clean, usable water bodies attract business and recreational dollars and measurably improve the economic health of the community. Remedial measures, designed to address current environmental conditions, can return water resources to an acceptable purity level.

However, billions of dollars are lost on public works projects, declining property values, and missed revenues from tourism, recreation, and other uses because of the missing link - community partnerships. Without community buy-ins by educated citizens who understand their individual responsibility and the community's needs, remediation will need to be repeated in each generation, if not more often.

Planning and prevention within the total community and watershed area comprise a vital permanent solution to water quality issues. In some cases, eliminating the cause of pollution may not be enough - the water body will still need rehabilitation. In other cases, communities must restore the quality of a water body even as they prevent further harm. Therefore, plan for the optimum, seeking guidance and cooperation from your community along the way. When the community agrees to implement the plan you know will work, you will have served them - and the environment - well.