

Know Where It Goes: Helping Communities be a Part of the Stormwater Solution

Lisa DeProspo Philo

Forty-three percent. That is the number of Rhode Islanders who are unfamiliar with the term “stormwater,” according to a survey conducted by the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension in January 2009. And it’s not just that people don’t recognize the word. Most are completely unaware that stormwater is the top water pollution problem in our state. So, if you have ever tried to enter into well-meaning conversation with someone by mentioning “stormwater” or “runoff,” you’ll have to forgive them, when their eyes glaze over or their feet begin to shuffle—away from you.

Fortunately, the conversation about stormwater does not have to end there. Thanks to funding from the RI Department of Transportation and support from the RI Department of Environmental Management, staff from URI Cooperative Extension and the Southern RI Conservation District have been working with a broad group of state, municipal, nonprofit, and private partners to create a central source for stormwater information. This team, now known as RI Stormwater Solutions, has developed an array of stormwater outreach and education materials. Those materials were created to help Rhode Island’s cities and towns meet their federal requirements about stormwater, but they are equally applicable to science educators, watershed volunteers, or other professionals working to improve our local water resources.

Among the collection of resources, which can be found online at www.RIStormwaterSolutions.org, are eye-catching cartoons by Don Bousquet. The cartoons cover a range of stormwater-related topics, including pet waste, rain barrels, lawn care, fertilizer use, leaf raking, and even the issue of general storm drain awareness, shown above right. The versatility and appeal of these cartoons makes them a useful



More Don Bousquet Cartoons can be found at
www.RIStormwaterSolutions.org

addition to almost any piece of stormwater outreach, and they have appeared in multiple papers along with a message that highlights simple steps that residents can take to reduce stormwater pollution.

If you’re more interested in organizing events that promote stormwater-friendly yard care practices, the resource collection contains a strategy for you. With information ranging from how to host a Master Gardener stormwater talk in your town to sample press releases and flyers about conducting a rain barrel sale, these resources can aid outreach that informs homeowners about yard care that doesn’t contribute to stormwater pollution. A rain garden manual will be the next addition to the collection, along with rain garden trainings in late March.

Finally, if adults are the only audience you’ve been targeting, you might also want to try kids. We have a myriad of resources aimed at young students, including guides to using watershed models, lesson plans about stormwater, games, and activity books. With so much fun incorporated into stormwater lessons, you’re likely to find that the children’s eyes don’t glaze over quite as quickly as many adults’, and they just might spread the message to their parents, too.

~Lisa DeProspo Philo is the communications specialist with RI NEMO.



Kids become messengers about stormwater by using an enviroscape to learn about where stormwater goes. Photo: Vanessa Venturini



Go Deeper!

For more information, contact
Lorraine Joubert at ljoubert@uri.edu
or (401) 874-2138.

To schedule a Master Gardener presentation or to
borrow a watershed model, please contact Vanessa
Venturini at vventurini@mail.uri.edu or (401) 874-7142.