

From: Regional Stormwater Program
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RSEP and LCC Release Stormwater Survey Data

South Burlington, VT* Findings released today indicate that residents do not have a clear idea of where stormwater goes and are generally unaware of the effect of their daily actions on sediment and contaminant levels in runoff and our waterways. The Regional Stormwater Education Program (RSEP) and the Lake Champlain Committee (LCC) released the results of a survey of 400 Chittenden County residents' knowledge and awareness of stormwater-related issues.

> "Sediment is the leading cause of water quality problems in urban streams. Sources of sediment include runoff from impervious surfaces and lawns," said Mike Winslow, staff scientist for the LCC. "These survey results tell us that people aren't connecting their personal actions to problems in local waterways."

Nearly 2 out of 3 survey respondents did not know that water from their outdoor lawn and garden runs directly into storm drains or creeks, rivers and Lake Champlain* untreated. In contrast, 81.8% understood that their kitchen/bath water was treated at either a waste treatment plant or through a septic system. Dirty stormwater can pose health hazards, kill fish and wildlife, cause beach closings, and lead to flooding.

> "Household-generated polluted runoff is a significant contributor to the overall water pollution problem in the Lake Champlain region and Vermont. Household-generated pollutants, such as nutrients from garden fertilizers, pesticides and animal wastes* and behaviors such as washing cars on paved driveways or digging for home landscaping projects without banking or berming* are negatively affecting the areas' water quality," said Bryan Osborne, vice-chair of the RSEP.

> A clear majority (57.2%) of respondents wash their cars at home. Of those who wash their car at home more than once a month, 68.3% always wash their car on a paved surface. Over half of respondents believe (incorrectly) there is very little or no impact from hosing sand, gravel and other debris off driveways and into street gutters. A majority of respondents (55.8%) believe (incorrectly) there is little or no impact on water quality in this region from erosion from small home/garden construction projects. In contrast, 69.1% understand that roads and pavement for large-scale commercial and residential development has a significant stormwater-related effect.

Animal waste is a leading source of bacteria pollution in our waterways. Regardless of whether they walk their dog(s) or have their own yard, a significant number of dog owners (3 out of 10 people who walk their dog and 4 out of 10 people with a yard) do not deposit their pet's waste in the trash or toilet.

> To increase public awareness about the causes of and solutions to polluted runoff, the RSEP will implement an educational campaign to spread the word about simple steps residents can take to minimize the impact of their actions on stormwater contamination. This campaign will include basic information about runoff, focusing on the topics and behaviors identified in the survey as least understood. By increasing residents' awareness of the impact of their everyday actions on the stormwater system, specifically home/lawn work, home construction and landscaping projects, car washing, and

other activities on paved driveways, and appropriate pet waste disposal, the RSEP hopes to improve water quality in local waterways and Lake Champlain.

The RSEP is a collaborative effort between eight Chittenden County towns, (Burlington, South Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Winooski, Shelburne, and Williston), the Burlington International Airport, Vermont Agency of Transportation, and the University of Vermont. The LCC is a non-profit organization focused on the health of Lake Champlain and its watershed.

For more information about the RSEP and its educational program contact Bryan Osborne, Colchester's Director of Public Works 654-0716. For more information about the stormwater survey results or water quality, contact Mike Winslow from the LCC at 658-1461.

Stormwater Survey Results Fact Sheet

Survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted by ORC Macro with a representative sample of 400 adults, age 18 and older living in Burlington, South Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Winooski, Shelburne, and Williston. The survey was conducted between September 11 and September 14, 2003. The Lake Champlain Committee analyzed the survey results on behalf of the Regional Stormwater Education Program. The margin of error is +/- 5% at a 95% confidence interval.

> Stormwater is water that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets and highways, playing fields, and gravel roads and parking lots, and flows into waterways or the storm drain system, which ultimately drains into waterways and Lake Champlain. With increasing development, more and more surfaces are impervious. Runoff that once percolated into the ground, where it could be cleaned and released slowly over time, now flows directly into storm drains and waterways. Stormwater picks up pollutants along the way, including oil and grease, harmful bacteria, fertilizers, toxic chemicals and other contaminants that are harmful to people, animals and aquatic life. A common misperception is that water running off streets > and into storm drains goes to a wastewater treatment plant. It does not. Stormwater usually receives no treatment before being discharged into waterways.

> The pollutants of greatest concern in stormwater are sediment and bacteria. Sediment can smother aquatic creatures and their habitat and transport nutrients and toxins downstream. High bacteria levels can lead to human illness and beach closings.

Survey Results

Nearly 2 out of 3 survey respondents did not know that water from their outdoor lawn and garden runs directly into storm drains or creeks, rivers and Lake Champlain* untreated Twenty-seven percent of respondents admit that they don't know where stormwater goes.

Our waterways are the final destination of stormwater* brooks, streams, rivers and ultimately, Lake Champlain. Except for a portion of the storm drain system in Burlington, stormwater in Chittenden County is not treated prior to discharge.

Forty percent of respondents report using fertilizer. Of these most use it on their lawn (44%) or gardens (48%). Thirty-nine percent of respondents use chemicals to control insects and thirty-two percent use chemicals to control weeds. Of people who report using pesticides, most (48%) apply pesticides to the lawn.

Pesticides are toxic and can be deadly to fish and their aquatic habitats. If chemicals must be used, they should be used sparingly and no more than the recommended amounts should be applied. Using natural alternatives to chemical fertilizers and pesticides is preferable. Avoid applying fertilizers and pesticides before it rains.

Twenty-seven percent of pet owners admit to not taking care of dog waste on walks; Thirty-eight percent do not take care of pet waste in their yards.

Pet waste contains bacteria and viruses that can contaminate surface and ground water, and cause beach closings. Pet owners should pick up after their pet and dispose of waste in a garbage can or toilet.

Fifty-seven percent of respondents wash their car at home. Of these sixty-eight percent always wash their car over paved surfaces and another ten percent occasionally wash their cars over paved surfaces.

Washing cars at home often uses more water than a commercial car wash and can introduce soap, oil and engine grime into the environment. Commercial car washes often filter, clean, and recycle wastewater and are required to dispose of it at a treatment facility. If you must wash cars at home, wash less, use a biodegradable phosphate-free soap, and wash it on the grass so that wastewater can soak into the ground.

Respondents believed the following activities had little or no impact on water quality: household construction projects (41%), hosing sediment off of driveways (47%), runoff from lawns and gardens (39%), and parking lot/road runoff (28%).

All of these activities are problematic because they contribute to sediment, which damages water quality. While one individual's impact from any one of these activities is minor, the combined and cumulative impact of these common practices has a significant impact on the quality of local waterways