

Spread the Words: Stencil Storm Drains!

Nonpoint source pollution is an issue in both urban and rural watersheds. One form of nonpoint source pollution in urban watersheds is the dumping of pollutants down storm drains. Automotive fluids, paints, fertilizers, and other chemicals dumped into storm drains go directly to the nearest lake, river, or stream. Most storm drains *do not* go to the nearest sewage treatment plant.

Local volunteer groups can become involved in protecting their watersheds by participating in a storm drain stenciling project. A basic project consists of stenciling a message next to the street drain such as “Dump No Waste – Drains to River (Lake, or Stream)” with the image of a fish or a faucet. Stenciling is then followed up by reminding local homeowners what they can do to protect water sources. The following are a few basic steps to consider when conducting a stenciling project:

- Call local officials for permission.
- Consider safety of participants.
- Prepare materials.
- Stencil in appropriate weather conditions: warm, dry, and calm.
- Call the media.
- Work in teams.
- Follow up with door hangers, fliers, etc. to explain your efforts.

When preparing materials, consider making up kits that can be easily accessed and distributed to volunteer teams. A kit may contain the following materials:

- Cans of spray paint
- Reflective or brightly colored safety vests
- Storm drain stencil
- Traffic cones
- One wire brush
- One wisk broom
- Gloves
- Brochures, door hangers, fliers, etc.

Storm drain stenciling is a great service-learning project that teaches volunteer groups about nonpoint source pollution. They will learn how they can be active participants in improving the quality of local water supplies.

Included in this packet is a sample door hanger that can be used to notify local residents of storm drain stenciling projects in their area. Use this opportunity to spotlight your efforts and to educate homeowners about simple water protection and conservation practices.

Storm drain stencils can be ordered from Earthwater Stencils. Their website is www.earthwater-stencils.com. When choosing paint, you'll want to use white, yellow, or another light, reflective color in which traffic paint is usually available. Hardware stores may sell spray paints specifically designed for painting driving surfaces. One volunteer group from Louisville, Kentucky collected recycled paint to stencil storm drains.

Before you begin your stenciling project, obtain permission from local officials. The city or county department responsible for maintaining storm drains can provide information on any restrictions in your area.

References

Hunter, Rhonda. Stormwater education with storm drain stenciling. Land and Water. March/April 1997.

North Carolina Storm Drain Stenciling Project, The. UNC-SG-94-07. "Storm Drain Stenciling in North Carolina."

Tulsa County Blue Thumb. "Giving Tulsa's Water a Hand." Tulsa, OK.

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