



## CASE STUDY

# King County Wastewater Education Program

Established to educate the public on how daily decisions affect water quality, the King County Community Services group, in King County, Washington, serves as a liaison between the county's Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) and residents, helping WTD protect public health and the environment by:

- Informing and educating the public about WTD functions and activities.
- Involving the community in decision making and problem solving.
- Keeping WTD informed about community concerns and issues.
- Fostering positive relationships with residents.
- Supporting WTD project teams to stay on schedule and budget.

## PROGRAM ELEMENTS

With an emphasis on water quality, conservation, and environmental stewardship, the community services group's outreach and education efforts include:

- Treatment plant tours with community members, professional groups, university groups, and high school students.
- Elementary and middle school field trips to treatment plants and natural areas.
- Family programs.
- Summer camps.
- Teacher trainings.
- Community open house events.
- Volunteer and internship programs.
- Demonstration gardens housed on the grounds of two treatment plants. The new demonstration gardens show how the use of biosolids and reclaimed water, both products of the wastewater treatment process.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The King County Wastewater Education Program focuses on how small behavioral changes can make a big impact on water quality and the environment. The county's community services group seeks to educate residents on:

- Methods to keep dangerous chemicals and items out of wastewater.
- Green cleaning alternatives.
- Water conservation.
- Combined sewer systems.
- Storm runoff.
- Products produced from wastewater treatment (biosolids, reclaimed wastewater, etc.).

Additional objectives include increased awareness of WTD's role in protecting public health and the environment, as well as increased understanding of WTD's mission, facilities, and operations in order to build support for WTD rates, projects, facilities, and

- Educational exhibit hall (Brightwater Environmental Education Center) focusing on a wide range of water-related issues, including water conservation, natural water systems and watersheds, man-made water systems (including septic systems), wastewater treatment, global water issues, water and electricity, and responsible choices for clean water.
- Social media, websites, and print materials (newsletters, fact sheets, and more).



WTD tour guides lead groups through each of the plant processes, beginning with preliminary treatment.

## PROMOTION

In addition to the educational exhibit hall, the King County community services group utilizes social media, press releases, print collateral, an exhibit hall, demonstration gardens, and its website to promote outreach activities.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Community Services managers recommend that other organizations seeking to launch similar outreach and education programs:

- Start small and phase in programming.
- Develop partnerships with non-profits and universities.
- Ask what problems need to be solved, then prioritize their importance.
- Set realistic goals with available resources, as it is often better to delve deeper into one issue or program than to try and do everything.

## RESULTS

With high attendance and significant public engagement, the results of the education program are overwhelmingly positive. Residents report they were not only unaware of manmade water systems, but “surprised that they can make a big difference in their water systems with small behavior changes and different choices.”

For more information on the Brightwater Center, visit <http://www.kingcounty.gov/environment/brightwater-center.aspx>.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with universities, non-profits, and government agencies have been an important part of outreach efforts. The University of Washington, Washington State University, IslandWood (a non-profit education institution), and other organizations regularly partner with the group for much of its water-related education programming.



Students grades 4-12 comment on their treatment plant tour experiences.

*“Dear Casey, Brian, Greg and the West Point Treatment staff,*

*Thank you so much for giving us such a great tour. My favorite things that you taught us were how clean you can get the water, what not to dump down the toilets, and about the biodiversity in a wetland.*

*Thanks!  
Leyis”*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE KING COUNTY WASTEWATER EDUCATION PROGRAM:

Please contact Susan Tallarico, Brightwater Environmental Education Center Director, at (206) 255-8663 or [susan.tallarico@kingcounty.gov](mailto:susan.tallarico@kingcounty.gov).

