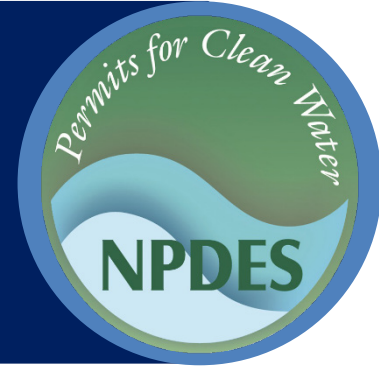# Stormwater Best Management Practice

Outreach Products and Program Promotion

Minimum Measure: Public Education and Outreach on Stormwater Impacts
Subcategory: Promoting the Stormwater Message

NPDES

Permits for Clean Water

Description

Outreach products and program promotional materials can be powerful tools to help municipalities increase public interest, awareness and support for stormwater programs. Municipalities can use a combination of digital media (e.g., social media, podcasts, videos, websites, listservs), traditional media outlets (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio) and in-person materials (e.g., signage, pamphlets, educational displays) to reach a variety of audiences and execute effective outreach campaigns.

Some municipalities may have public relations departments, communications departments or social media managers who handle these types of outreach materials. Some may contract with public relations firms and graphic designers. Others may rely on technical program staff to also implement public education and outreach. Regardless of who produces the materials, municipalities should be intentional when deciding which medium to use and what types of messages are appropriate for that medium.

EPA has developed a collection of communications tools for outreach, called Stormwater Smart, that includes a range of products municipalities can use and customize to increase awareness as well as promote practices and investments in stormwater management.

Benefits of Outreach

Increase Public Awareness

- Distribute information in places where the public is likely to encounter it to increase awareness and interest.
- Reach different groups and stakeholders by incorporating a variety of products and media types.

Engage the Community

- Develop consistent communication channels where the public can reliably receive up-to-date stormwater management information.

Managing Paint Waste Wisely

What Every Painter Needs to Know

Controlando los Residuos de Pintura

Lo que Todo Pintor Necesita Saber

The City of Springfield, Oregon, creates informational pamphlets, brochures and fact sheets to educate residents about important stormwater topics. The city's "Managing Paint Waste Wisely" brochure is available on its website in English and Spanish.

- Invite the public to program events and give them opportunities to participate in community stormwater program decisionmaking.
- Foster feelings of inclusion and empowerment among community members by allowing them to be a part of the team looking for solutions to the stormwater impacts they face.

Increase Program Success

- Execute solutions with the help and support of interested and knowledgeable community members.
- Track effectiveness of communication methods and adapt based on metrics of success.

Considerations

Determine Goals and Objectives

Before designing materials or choosing specific implementation strategies, municipalities may first identify the goals and objectives of their outreach materials. They can consider what type of information they would like to convey and at what level of detail. Outreach products and program promotional materials can have varying costs, turnaround times and degrees of impact, so a clear definition of goals at the onset can help refine the scope of a campaign and narrow down the best options for outreach and media materials.

Identify the Audience

Community members may consume media differently depending on factors such as their age, socioeconomic status, disability status and English language proficiency. For example, people of all generations consume social media, but certain platforms might be more popular among younger people while others attract older ones. Therefore, municipalities can consider the following questions before choosing a specific medium for their outreach material:

- Who is the audience (e.g., general public, developers, homeowners)?
- How does the audience get its information (e.g., social media, television, in-person events)?
- Where is the audience most likely to encounter an outreach product or promotional material?
- What knowledge base does the audience have?
- How much information should the municipality communicate (e.g., simple concepts, detailed technical information)?
- Does the audience have specific language or accessibility needs (e.g., translated documents or speech, screen-reader-friendly digital media)?
- What constraints limit the municipality's path to effective engagement (e.g., specialized staff, equipment, software, budget)?

For best results, municipalities can repeat any messaging periodically and link it to something the audience values. For example, if stormwater pollutants have a known harmful effect on the local aquatic ecosystem, municipalities may choose to focus outreach messages on the risk to recreational fishing, public beaches or income from tourism.

Accessibility

Municipalities should develop inclusive products and program promotion materials to ensure they reach all kinds of people. For print materials, choose sans serif fonts with at least 11-point type using a light pastel or white background. Avoid red-green color combinations, as this is the most common form of color blindness. For digital media, use other cues in addition to color to identify links and interactive elements. Confirm that all images, tables and charts have meaningful alt-text and ensure text is selectable (i.e., able to be copied and pasted) so it is easy to screen-read or translate. Finally, consider publishing materials in other languages if the target audience has a predominant language other than English.

Implementation Strategies

This section describes some of the strategies municipalities can use to communicate stormwater news and prepare and distribute educational materials. When choosing an implementation strategy, it is important to consider the relative costs, impact and turnaround time. For example, interviews with the local newspaper may only reach subscribers, but they will have a quick turnaround time. Writing text-only fact sheets for a department website may be cost effective compared to hiring a contractor to incorporate graphics, but it may not be as engaging as infographics or as far-reaching as a social media campaign. Videos may effectively communicate technical information but can be expensive to produce. Municipalities can pursue a variety of strategies to increase impact and reinforce community engagement with different groups and audiences.

Online Resources and Notices

A municipality's website—specifically the page for the stormwater department or any other relevant department—is a good place to share stormwater information. This content may include:

- An easy-to-navigate list of resources, webpages and promotional material tailored to specific audiences. For example, this Wakefield, Massachusetts, page includes links to relevant stormwater tips and

guidance materials tailored toward residents, businesses and industrial organizations.

- Links to existing educational materials and to relevant social media accounts.
- Prompts to sign up for an online newsletter/listserv.
- Educational videos or video series, such as the library of videos from Muncie, Indiana.
- Interactive storymaps, like this one from Sante Fe, Arizona.

Interest-group websites can also be a good way to reach specific audiences such as recreational fishers, automobile mechanics or farmers. Local watershed or environmental nonprofits may also be open to hosting educational materials on their websites.

A municipality can develop an automated email address list (listserv) to help distribute outreach products to interested community members and stakeholders. An active stormwater program can establish a listserv to keep stakeholders updated on meetings, policy discussions and other developments. A municipality may also choose to publish a periodic newsletter to distribute to the group.

Social Media

It is increasingly common to communicate with the public through social media. Municipalities often use communications departments or social media managers to navigate this area. Stormwater programs may share information through their municipalities' general accounts. For example, Durham, North Carolina, Public Works announced updates to a stormwater restoration project and sought public input via a social media post from the City of Durham account. Public works departments or stormwater utilities may also have their own accounts, where they have exclusive control over the content shared. The City of Durham Public Works department also has its own account, where it shares additional videos, infographics, event announcements and project updates.

Social media is a great way to share both new and existing educational material. Municipalities can deploy campaigns by posting at regular intervals and using photos, images or infographics to engage the audience. They can time posts strategically around new program promotion. To get extra mileage out of existing media,

they can reshare that content: for example, resharing news articles, linking existing fact sheets, promoting podcast episodes, or reminding the public of events where there will be educational displays and other resources.

Print Materials

Pamphlets, flyers, newsletters and fact sheets effectively present and explain stormwater messages. Municipalities can post them on websites as PDFs, distribute them to listservs (e.g., local homeowner associations), or distribute them as hard copies at events, in public venues (e.g., libraries, schools, offices), by mail or as bill inserts.

Before creating print media, it is important to identify its purpose and the intended outcome. Is it to promote stormwater education or to change behaviors? Is it to generate interest in a specific stormwater event or activity? Who is your audience? Should it be predominately text to communicate program details, or can you communicate the message with a simple infographic? The purpose will help define the appearance and content of the materials.

For examples of print materials, visit Springfield, Oregon's library of stormwater brochures, guides and fact sheets.

Signs and Placards

Signs can be useful for communicating stormwater concepts or concerns at the source. Municipalities can post stormwater pollution information on signs along roadsides and at parks to discourage littering. Placing placards near storm drains can discourage dumping, like these placards used by the City of Charleston, West Virginia. Municipalities can also install placards near green infrastructure (e.g., a bioretention area) to educate the public about the technology and its multiple benefits. For example, Rhode Island is sharing standardized educational signs to use with green infrastructure.

Local Media: Newspapers, Magazines, Radio, Television

Local newspapers and magazines are vehicles for delivering educational information, policy analyses, public notices and other messages. They make their articles accessible through website or by hard copy.

Note that some news outlets place their information behind a paywall, so it may not reach the whole community.

Local radio stations offer various methods of communication. Public stations often devote more time to news and educational programming but might not reach the entire target audience. Popular music stations may offer opportunities for brief announcements or paid advertisements for public education events.

Local television reporters are generally interested in covering environmental stories that pertain to their area and tend to focus on people. Issues and events will attract television coverage if they involve local people and community concerns, focus on the unique or the unusual, affect many people throughout a region, or involve controversy or strong emotions. Municipalities can attract news coverage by calling a local news station, emailing a reporter directly or tagging a reporter in a social media campaign.

Podcasts

Podcasts are easy to access and easy to share across social media. Many podcast platforms allow tracking of subscriber and listener numbers, which can help a municipality understand the reach of its messages. An existing, topical podcast may invite guest speakers for interviews in in-depth stories. For example, the Southern Environmental Law Center produced an episode titled "Breaking Point" on its podcast Broken Ground interviewing city officials in Charleston, South Carolina, about their plans to address flooding. A municipality may have its own podcast that features various departments on a rotating schedule. Colorado Springs hosts a podcast called "Behind the Springs," one episode of

which features a litter reduction campaign and an interview with a city stormwater specialist. The Department of Public Works and Environmental Services in Fairfax County, Virginia, produces a podcast, called EnviroPod, that exclusively discusses its ongoing activities.

Educational Displays

Educational displays can be an effective way to convey information about a stormwater pollution reduction campaign or program. Built on trifold boards or as professionally printed pop-up signs, they are usually multimedia, tabletop exhibits. They engage passersby at conferences, seminars, outdoor events, libraries, schools and other community events and venues—all of which offer an excellent opportunity to share information, educate and involve citizens, promote volunteerism, and build general awareness. Staffing displays whenever possible helps to offer further explanation and answers to questions.

Additional Resources

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Stormwater Smart Outreach Tools
- Idaho Falls Public Works published its outreach strategy and annual results in its Stormwater and Water Conservation Public Outreach Plan.
- New York City's comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan includes a chapter outlining public education and outreach strategies.
- The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection offers stormwater outreach materials for municipal separate storm sewer system permittees.

Additional Information

Additional information on related practices and the Phase II MS4 program can be found at EPA's National Menu of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Stormwater website

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Disclaimer

This fact sheet is intended to be used for informational purposes only. These examples and references are not intended to be comprehensive and do not preclude the use of other technically sound practices. State or local requirements may apply.