

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.

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