

Press Release

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University of Rhode Island, DOT, DEM, and Other Supporters Kick Off “Know Where It Goes” Campaign

As we move into the dog days of summer, beach closures due to poor water quality become a near daily occurrence here in the Ocean State. Now there is a push by a coalition of state agencies, businesses and environmental groups to educate residents about steps they can take to help protect RI water quality.

“By following the simple steps outlined in the newly unveiled “Know Where It Goes” campaign, we can all help battle stormwater pollution,” said Robert Weygand, Vice President of Administration at the University of Rhode Island. Weygand heads up URI’s Council for Sustainability which is making efforts to minimize pollution in stormwater on the campus and supporting the statewide educational campaign.

“Stormwater pollution occurs when water from a rainstorm, a garden hose or any other source carries pollutants such as pet waste, car fluids and fertilizers into street storm drains”, explains Weygand. “This runoff is almost always carried directly into our waterways without any treatment at all. It’s a major source of pollution, but one that we can control with education and simple behavioral changes.”

Officials hope to use the light-hearted media campaign, coupled with an environmental education program for school children, to show state residents and businesses the simple steps they can take to make sure harmful substances don’t enter stormwater drains that flow to Narragansett Bay and other bodies of water.

“The campaign is based on water quality research conducted at URI and other universities,” explained Jeff Seemann, Dean of URI’s College of the Environment and Life Sciences. “but, the solutions aren’t necessarily high tech or expensive.”

For example, URI research shows that while lawns do a good job of absorbing fertilizers and other chemicals, if the chemicals land on a sidewalk or driveway, they flow directly into our water bodies. A simple way to avoid this is to sweep up any lawn chemicals that land on sidewalks or driveways.

Save the Bay has been involved with the campaign from the onset. “We’ve been

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working to control stormwater pollution for years but many people are still unaware of the problem.” explains Save the Bay’s John Torgan. “We’re happy to support this statewide effort to get the word out and Save the Bay looks forward to the day when our beaches stay open for swimming all summer.”

Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian is among the municipal leaders supporting the campaign. “One of the key aspects of our quality of life in both the City of Warwick and Rhode Island as a whole is our ability to access and enjoy the Bay. I believe with this effort as their guide, Warwick residents and the members of my administration will be willing and able to do their part.”

The Director of the Department of Transportation, Michael Lewis, explained that his staff and local public works departments have already participated in several training programs designed to improve stormwater management on state and local roads, including basic care and maintenance of stormdrain systems and “good house keeping” to prevent pollution at public works facilities. “We’re committed to working to minimizing pollution from roadways and public works projects” Lewis said.

The Director of the RIDEM, Michael Sullivan, noted that new state stormwater standards, scheduled for completion this year, will promote use of updated methods designed to reduce the volume of runoff and promote filtering and infiltration for better treatment. Over the next several years, the agency will encourage municipalities and businesses to install rain gardens, green roofs and other landscaping techniques that allow rain water to percolate into the ground rather than flowing down stormdrains.

“Right now Rhode Islanders can view these innovative stormwater management techniques at Save the Bay’s headquarters,” Sullivan noted, “but over the next few years, they will be installed at our state university and in cities and towns throughout Rhode Island. It’s an exciting step in protecting the water resources that make Rhode Island such a special place to live and work.”

In the upcoming year, the URI College of the Environment and Life Sciences will offer stormwater management workshops for municipalities and businesses. The focus will be on public education strategies for RI municipalities, model ordinances for local stormwater management, and updated State Stormwater Standards. They also will coordinate an effort to educate school children about stormwater pollution and how to control it.

The stormwater campaign is sponsored by a coalition of private and public sector organizations committed to protecting Rhode Island water quality. The coalition is directed by URI’s College of the Environment and Life Sciences, with funding from the state Department of Transportation and in cooperation with the state Department of Environmental Management, RI municipalities, environmental groups and private businesses.

For more information on steps people can follow to reduce stormwater pollution, visit the website www.ristormwatersolutions.org.

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