



URI students mark storm drains in town

By Chris Sheldon / Special to the Press

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WESTERLY – Conserving and preserving water resources are important things people can do to help the environment.

The Feinsein Enriching America Program and a University of Rhode Island 101 class are doing their part by marking storm drains throughout Washington County.

On Saturday, Oct. 4th, they marked storm drains in Westerly with blue and green, “Don’t Dump, Drains to Coast” labels to let people know they shouldn’t dump pollutants or other materials into, or near, storm drains.

Previously, the students marked drains around the URI campus and 140 storm drains in Narragansett.

The project is done with the help of Save the Bay, the Surf Rider Foundation, Rhode Island Stormwater Solutions campaign, and the Rhode Island Departments of Transportation and Environmental Management and URI.

Eighteen student volunteers, representatives from the Save the Bay and the storm drain marking coordinator at URI Cooperative Extension Vanessa Venturini met at the Westerly Landing and broke up into groups to mark the storm drains.

“It’s great because the kids are not only learning about the problem, now they get to be part of the solution,” said Venturini of Warwick.

This is the second year URI has been involved in this project and the first year for Venturini.

Some drains in Westerly have already been marked by the town, so the volunteers marked drains on many of the side streets.

They used a special adhesive to attach the labels on top of the storm drains. They don’t place them on the sides because they could be ripped off by street cleaners or snow plows.

Famous Pizza at 3 East Ave in Westerly provided pizza for the students after they were done marking the storm drains.

Rainwater collects remnants of litter, motor oil, bacteria from pet waste, excess fertilizers and pesticides, leaves and grass clippings. The water containing these materials then travels to storm drains which lead to local rivers, lakes and the ocean. These pollutants can close beaches and fishing grounds, threaten water sources, harm natural areas and contribute to

flooding.

“A simple act, such as washing your car in the driveway, fertilizing the lawn, or walking your dog could substantially damage water quality,” said Venturini.

She suggests several steps to help prevent stormwater pollution such as never dumping anything into the path of a storm drain, using organic fertilizers and using nonhazardous household products at home.

She also says people should have their septic systems inspected every year and pumped every three to five years.

You can email Vanessa at VVenturini@mail.uri.edu to volunteer for future storm drain marking events.
