

# Public Education

An important part of most water quality service projects is telling how to prevent pollution through best management practices. (See page 4.) A broad consensus of political and scientific opinion supports these practices. Indeed, due to the very nature of nonpoint source pollution, public education is an essential strategy to protect every watershed. In order to reduce pollution, people must become informed and involved.

## ACTION STEPS

Circumstances may set the order in which you do these steps. For example, if you already know your audience and method (such as presenting a skit for senior citizens), you may need to go back to identify the most relevant need and message for this group.

### 1. Identify a need

**Ask local watershed management agencies** what management practices they most want to inform the public about. For example, students in Minneapolis learned from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District and the city that leaves and grass clippings in the streets – thus in storm drains – pose a great threat to water quality in the Chain of Lakes.



**Student research may uncover a problem** that can be addressed through public education.

### *When is advocacy appropriate?*

Youth may want to speak out on public policy issues such as a proposed road or a new law. Before taking on an advocacy project, consider:

- Have students researched issues thoroughly?
- When there are differences of opinion or competing scientific explanations, have students examined the range of perspectives in a thorough and balanced way?
- Have students explored different perspectives (including social and economic) and formed their own opinions?
- Have students thought creatively and critically about the issues?

The agencies listed inside the back cover offer many excellent fliers, posters, videos, etc. Or investigate the SEEK Web site, also given there. The handout on page 4 identifies basic actions that apply across most of the state. For example, Mounds View students sampled area soil samples and found that most yards had enough phosphorus without application of it in lawn fertilizers. Excess phosphorus feeds algae outbreaks in lakes and streams.

### 2. Target an audience

**Narrow target audience** to a manageable size, by...

- **Geography:** What is your watershed? Does a problem affect part of the watershed or neighborhood, for example, one side of a lake, or a specific town?
- **Behavior:** What is the impact on water quality of a specific group, such as automobile drivers, homeowners, hikers, or even students who snack outside during recess?
- **Demographics:** Do youth have access to a particular audience, such as senior citizens or primary school students? How does this group impact water quality?

### 3. Define the message

#### Identify the purpose of your project:

- What is the main point of your message?
- What do you want the audience to know – or to *do*?
- Why is it important?
- How will you know you have accomplished your goals?

#### Decide how best to speak to the target audience:

- What most interests them? What will their attention?
- Where do they get their information?
- How might they react to this message?
- What might worry or upset the audience? What might calm those fears?
- What arguments or evidence is most likely to convince them? Whom will they believe?

### 4. Choose a method of communication

Based on answers to the questions above, and upon available resources (including time), choose a means to communicate *your* message to *your* audience.

**For each of these nine methods, it is essential to use the guidelines on page 11 under “Ensure Quality.”**

#### A. Make and distribute fliers or posters.

Note: For all distribution methods, an adult must stay in sight of students at all times.

- Deliver fliers door-to-door:
  - Students must pair up.
  - Rubber band fliers to door handles; do not put in mail boxes; do not go into houses.
- Hand out fliers at events:
  - Get permission from event organizers.
  - Put up a banner, posters, balloons, or a display to attract attention.
  - Always be polite.
  - Engage passersby with a question, such as, “What do you think is the greatest source of pollution in our area?”
  - Practice a short speech.
  - Brainstorm questions people might ask. Role play responses.
  - Practice how students should handle people who act rudely or inappropriately. (i.e. Say nothing. Walk away. Go straight to supervising adult.)

#### Put up posters in area businesses:

- Make a list of prospective businesses and organizations. Ask the local business association to endorse your effort.
- Write a brief letter of introduction. Say who you are; list your goals; explain exactly what you are asking for, e.g. to display posters until a given date.
- At each business, ask for the owner or manager. Give a short prepared speech.

Give him or her your letter and a poster.

- Bring thumb tacks, scotch tape, and masking tape. Ask if you may put up poster

or leave it for them to put up.

- Send thank-you notes to each place that puts up a poster.



#### B. Write articles for local weekly newspapers or magazines.

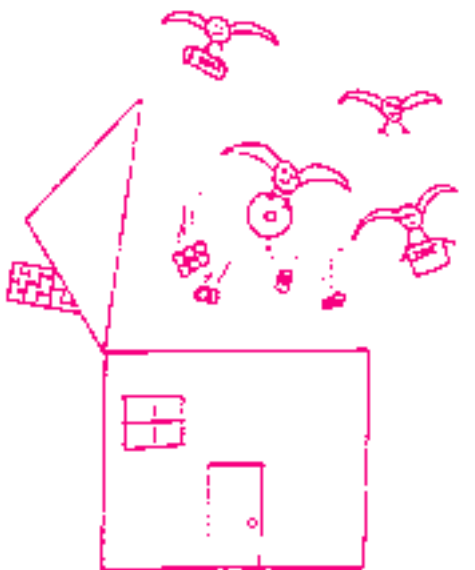
- Ask the school district communications person for suggestions or help.
- Make a list of weekly newspapers or magazines. Look under “newspapers” in the Yellow Pages. Check the library for magazines. Browse the World Wide Web.
- Read a copy of the publication to get a feel for what they look for.
- Call or e-mail potential publications to ask for written guidelines for submissions. These include deadlines, length, format, style, and possible subjects of articles.
- Call the editor to ask if a story idea interests him or her. Offer to illustrate with photographs or drawings.
- When submitting an article, follow guidelines *exactly*. A short cover letter may be o.k.

**C. Present lessons - to peers, elementary school classes, or after school clubs.**

- Contact teachers to discuss what concepts, skills, or information related to water quality fit their curriculum. Work out how many lessons will be presented and how long each will be.
- Students may develop their own lessons, or use pre-existing ones appropriate to the audience. Ask a nature center or museum for activity examples. ("Project WET" and "Aquatic Wild" both require training. Contact Minnesota DNR. See inside back cover.)  
Or contact:
  - "Give Water a Hand" (See inside front cover.)
  - Pauline Langsdorf, Twin Cities Metropolitan Council (Call (612) 602-1805.)
- Practice presentations/lessons. Time practices. Get feedback and revise.

**D. Decorate grocery bags, then return to store for distribution.**

- Contact area grocers to find out if they will put out decorated bags. Discuss how many bags you will need. Arrange for pick-ups.
- Paint or draw directly on each bag. Potatoes make an inexpensive if crude printing plate. Dip in tempera or ink. Wood, linoleum, etc. require technical skill.
- Make fliers to put inside bags.



**TAKE A HINT**  
DUE TO THEIR MIGHT RETURN THE UNCLE TOM'S

**E. Stencil storm drains.** (See pages 15-16.)

**F. Write and produce skits or videos.**

- Brainstorm stories ideas that would communicate your message.
- Divide into committees by task:
  - Scripting: writes story; makes list of scenes to be shot (video)/ sets stage directions – who stands where on stage (skits)
  - Equipment: gets equipment/ props, takes responsibility for their care; shoots video; makes scenery, sets it up and takes it down
  - Editing: edits raw video footage into final product (video)
  - Booking: lines up sites to put on skit; lines up public access cable or other video showings
  - Publicity: puts up posters, submits notices to calendars such as newspaper, makes announcements at school, etc.
  - Production: decides production schedule for committees; makes sure each committee is on schedule; solves problems as they come up

**G. Create a display or booth.**

- Design and build display.
- Brainstorm list of display sites: schools, libraries, store fronts, nature centers, shopping malls, houses of worship, agencies, museums, fairs, conferences, or festivals.
- Decide when you want your display in the community. Revise your dates when you have sites confirmed. Make a project calendar.
- Contact sites by phone and letter. Explain your purpose and how long you hope your display or booth will be up. List sites on a calendar.
- Create sign-up list for students to staff booth. Practice a short speech to draw passersby to the booth. Offer "freebie" pencils, bookmarks, or candy.
- Send thank-you notes to all who agree to host display or booth.

#### H. Organize a presentation to watershed district, city council, etc. or community forum

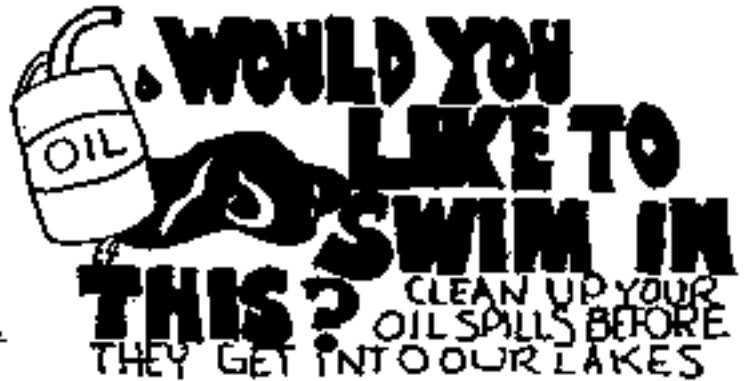
- Identify the public body responsible for policies related to students' concern.
- Establish a contact with someone who can explain procedures and help with scheduling.
- Decide whether to hold a forum at your school or organization or to get on the agenda of a regular meeting of the body.
- Think about inviting the media. Send notices to the media two weeks in advance. Follow up with a phone call.
- Practice your presentation.
- Students must dress appropriately and act with respect.
- Follow up to find out what was done to address students' concerns.
- Send thank you notes.

#### I. Organize a water festival for the community.

Work with an existing science or arts festival.

- Organize a planning committee. Pick a site and date.
- Brainstorm themes, including a catchy slogan and logo.
- Design a flier explaining the theme, and telling what people can do to prevent pollution.
- Make buttons, posters, or "freebies" to give out.
- Be creative with refreshments, such as spring water or little fish crackers.
- Offer music, skits, story tellers, dancers, or other entertainment.
- Create interactive displays, booths, or games, such as: types of wetlands; native plants, fish, and animals; watershed maps; stream table; garbage sculpture from cleanups; watershed district or city water quality projects.
- Send announcements to local media, including school district newsletters.

An excellent resource is the Groundwater Foundation guide to a Children's Groundwater Festival, PO Box 22558, Lincoln, NE 68542-2558 (402) 434-2740 434-2742 fax.



### 5. Ensure quality

Standards of quality for student products will help ensure that their message gets across as they intend. Students might compare information in their drafts with agency literature. (Also see handout on page 4 of this guide.) Students may also wish to ask agencies, parents, or peers to review drafts.

Quality products must be...

- **Accurate:** Information and recommended actions are based on reliable sources, and are appropriate to address identified problems. Identify sources of information in footnotes.
- **Clear:** Give specific details and examples. Materials or presentations identify actions the targeted audience could realistically take. Text is short and to the point. Illustrations tell a story or add valuable ideas and information. Designs are uncluttered. Main points stand out.
- **Attractive:** Products feature a "hook" that draws attention to the message. (A "hook" could be a picture, slogan, sound, etc. that works well in the medium used.) They show creative use of materials or design, and are neatly done.
- **Respectful:** Content and style are appropriate to the audience. Clearly identify your group and any partner groups.

Incorporate a service project as a task to demonstrate learning within a Performance Package of the Minnesota Graduation Standards. (See page 6.)