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Spotlight on ... Pennichuck Water Works

Finding out where those storm drains go and telling people about it!

With a water supply watershed stretching over 27.5 square miles and encompassing five municipalities, it's virtually impossible for Pennichuck Water Works to know what is contained in the runoff that eventually finds its way to the Pennichuck Ponds system. As systems using a surface source know, the quality of the source water is a direct reflection of the surrounding watershed. In Pennichuck's case, several parts of its watershed contain some of the most developed land in the state making it even more difficult to keep an eye on possible contaminants. To address this challenge, Pennichuck is currently involved in a storm drain mapping and marking project.

The project's purpose is two-fold: to educate the public about the connection between storm drains and surface waters in an effort to discourage dumping of pollutants, and to inform emergency officials of the locations of storm drains in case of an accidental release. In both cases, the hope is to lessen the likelihood that any pollutants will enter the drainage system and, thus, the water supply. Several tasks make up the project.

First, with the help of existing maps and fieldwork, over 1,500 storm drains were located within the watershed. This data, as well as information on the flow direction and outfalls on public land, was incorporated into new maps. Town-specific maps were recently provided to emergency officials along with recommendations for how this information can be useful to them

in preventing pollutants from entering the drains at the scene of an accident.

The final phase of the project, to be completed this spring, involves marking each of the storm drains with a 3" x 5" impact- and fade-resistant marker that reads "Let Only Rain Go Down the Storm Drain – Drains to Water Supply." The marker is intended to alert residents and businesses to the presence of the storm drain and its direct connection to waterways that supply their drinking water. Recent studies in Wisconsin and Washington have shown that storm drain marking works

to raise citizen awareness of storm drain connections to local waterways. Over 75 percent of people who had seen the stenciled drains knew where their water went, compared to about a third of those who had not seen a stenciled drain.

Pennichuck plans to utilize volunteers, such as Boy Scouts and other civic groups, to attach the markers. At first glance, it might seem that Pennichuck is just saving itself some manpower, but by involving the public in the storm drain marking project, they have turned it into a community-based, environmental stewardship activity, thus increasing the learning potential and understanding of the project.

For more information about this project, please contact Don Ware at (603) 882-5191, or for more information on conducting your own storm drain marking project, visit www.earthwater-stencils.com.

