

WINTER 2008

WATER Works!

Provided as a public service for our neighbors and customers...

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What is Nonpoint Source Pollution and Why Should It Concern Us?

The dramatic stories about Earth's environmental problems tend to focus on big, recognizable targets such as smoking industrial facilities, leaking toxic waste dumps, and messy oil spills. Hence, people often forget about water and stormwater pollution caused by smaller non-point sources -- including pollution at the household level. The fact is, however, that non-point source (NPS) pollution is a leading source of water quality degradation. Although individual homes might contribute only minor amounts of NPS pollution, the combined effect of an entire neighborhood can be significant. Homeowners can learn about the causes of NPS pollution, and take the necessary, and often money-saving, actions to tackle the problem.

Here are some frequently asked questions about this important topic:

Q. What is polluted runoff?

A. Rainwater seeps either into the ground or "runs off" to lower areas, making its way into streams, lakes and other bodies of water. Runoff water can pick up and carry many substances that pollute water. Some of the substances -- pesticides, fertilizers, oil and soap -- can be harmful even in small quantities. Others (sediment from construction, bare soil, or agricultural land, or pet waste, grass clippings and leaves) can harm creeks, rivers and lakes when present in sufficient quantities. In addition to stormwater runoff, various human activities like lawn watering, car washing, and malfunctioning septic tanks can also put water onto the land surface where runoff occurs and carries pollutants to creeks, rivers and lakes. The quantity of stormwater is also a problem when stormwater falls on hard surfaces like roads, roofs, driveways and parking lots, stormwater cannot seep into the ground and runs off to lower areas. For example, consider the difference between one inch of rain falling onto a meadow and the same amount onto a parking lot. The parking lot sheds 16 times the amount of water that a meadow does!

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Stormwater Pollution...

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More water runs off hard surfaces, and developed areas experience local flooding. The high volume of water also causes stream banks to erode and washes the wildlife downstream.

Q. What causes polluted stormwater runoff?

A. Most people are unaware of how individuals impact water quality, and are surprised to learn that folks going about their daily lives are the number one source of stormwater pollutants. Common examples include over-fertilizing lawns, excessive pesticide use, not picking up pet waste, letting oil drip out of their vehicles, and littering. Developed areas in general, with increased runoff, concentrated numbers of people and animals, construction and other activities, are a major contributor to NPS pollution, as are agricultural activities.



Q. Why does this kind of pollution happen more in developed areas?

A. Urban and suburban landscapes are covered by paved surfaces like sidewalks, parking lots, roads, and driveways that prevent water from percolating into the ground, cause runoff to accumulate, and funnel into storm drains at high speeds. Thus, quickly flowing runoff empties into receiving

waters and the fast flow severely erodes stream banks. Paved surfaces transfer heat to runoff, thereby increasing the temperature of receiving waters. Native species of fish and other aquatic life cannot survive in warmer waters. One way to help limit NPS pollution from paved surfaces involves substituting alternatives to areas traditionally covered by nonporous surfaces.



Grasses and natural ground cover, for example, can be attractive and practical substitutes for paved driveways, walkways, and patios. Some homes effectively incorporate a system of natural grasses, trees, and mulch to limit continuous impervious surface area. Wooden decks, gravel or brick paths, and rock gardens keep the natural ground cover intact and allow rainwater to slowly seep into the ground.

Q. Does it really matter what I plant in my yard?

A. Altering the natural contours of yards during landscaping and planting with non-native plants that need fertilizer and extra water increases the potential for higher runoff volumes, increases erosion, and introduces chemicals into the path of runoff. In contrast, xeriscape landscaping provides households with a framework that dramatically reduces the potential for NPS pollution.

Xeriscape incorporates

many environmental factors into landscape design -- soil type, use of native plants, practical turf areas, proper irrigation, mulches, and appropriate maintenance schedules. Using native plants well suited to a region's climate and pests drastically reduces the need for irrigation and chemical applications. Less irrigation results in less runoff, while less chemical application keeps runoff clean.

Q. What do I need to know about proper chemical use, storage, and disposal?

A. Household cleaners, grease, oil, plastics, and some food or paper products should NEVER be flushed down drains or washed down the street. Over time, chemicals corrode pipes and might not be completely removed during the filtration process. Chemicals poured down the drain interferes with the chemical and biological breakdown of the wastes in the wastewater treatment system. Homeowners can try natural alternatives to chemical fertilizers and pesticides on household lawns and gardens, and apply no more than the recommended amounts. Natural predators like insects and bats, composting, and the use of native plants can reduce or entirely negate the need for chemicals. Xeriscape can limit chemical applications to lawns and gardens. If chemicals are needed around the



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Community Heartline

WATER IS LIFE! However, water is not the only item needed to sustain life and that is why FBCMUD #25 -- as your water provider -- is initiating several socially responsible programs that will make life better for the residents in our community. In 2008, please consider partnering with the District for our **COMMUNITY HEARTLINE** projects -- things that will make you feel just a little bit better -- by helping others who may not be able to help themselves...by making a difference where you live...for your family and neighbors.

Quarterly Community Blood Drives

The need for blood donations go beyond what people see on television and the news. Blood is needed for individuals being treated for cancer, babies that are born prematurely, individuals with anemia, accident victims, people going to surgery, transplant recipients and much more.

Blood donations save lives and there is no substitute. However, blood can only come from one individual to go to another, and every donation can help save up to three lives. Most people don't realize that it takes at least 36-48 hours to collect, test, and process blood and make units available for transfusion. Thus, if you wait for an event to occur before you donate, it may be too late!

Individuals are encouraged to Commit for Life and donate at least once every quarter because blood must be on the shelves and ready to go when an event occurs. The District is partnering with the Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center to host community-wide blood drives quarterly in the District's conference center, to make the donation opportunity as convenient as possible, which is key to ensuring a readily available, healthy blood supply.

Groups such as businesses, churches or other faith-based organizations, high schools and communities just like us schedule blood drives on a regular basis to help ensure their employees, students, congregates, and communities/residents can **Commit for Life** to enhance the opportunity to preserve life.

The first community blood drive was held at the District's conference center (adjacent to the business office on Old Richmond Road on February 16, 2008, but if you missed that event, plan to participate in future events on April 25th from 12:30-5:00 pm; July 12th from 9:00 am - 1:30 pm; and November 22nd from 9:00 am to 1:30 pm. Each event will be announced as a reminder in the monthly water bill and on the District's web site www.waterdistrict25.com.



Letisha Smith and David Teel (Blood Center Representatives) with District representatives Nicole Cempa and Chris Stephenson.

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Commit for Life!

What Happens When the Water is Gone?

How vulnerable is south-east Texas to a serious water shortage? With sustained population growth in its burgeoning metropolitan areas, combined with Harris County's mandated conversion of ground water usage to surface water (to stem subsidence), we can't dismiss the possibility of a major water shortfall in our near future.

At this writing, eleven West Texas cities are battling serious water problems. Officials cut 2008 water allotments to these cities because a major water source, Lake Meredith, is dangerously depleted resulting from severe drought conditions in 2005 and 2006. The Canadian River Municipal Water Authority provides water from Lake Meredith as well as ground-water wells in Roberts County. For the third straight year, the cities (Pampa, Borger, Amarillo, Plainview, Lubbock, and six smaller cities) will get 5,000 fewer acre feet of water. One acre foot equals about 325,800 gallons.

Texas cities are not alone!

A drought of epic proportions in the U. S. Southeast threatens the water supply for millions including Georgia's fast-growing Atlanta area. Florida anticipates inadequate water resources to supply its continuing population boom. And those vast deposits of fresh water, The Great Lakes, are actually shrinking while upstate New York's reservoirs have dropped to record lows. And out west, the Sierra Nevada snowpack is melting faster each year.

The federal government projects that no fewer than thirty-six states will face water shortages within five years. Solving the problem means an end to cheap water in most areas. Experts estimate

that upgrading just the pipes alone to handle reliable new supplies will cost this country \$300 billion...yes, billion...over the next thirty years. As Senator Everett Dirksen once said about the Defense budget, "a billion here, a billion there, pretty soon you're talking about real money."



According to the U. S. Geological Survey's latest figures, the United States consumed more than 148 trillion gallons of water for residential, commercial, agricultural, manufacturing and miscellaneous uses in 2000, almost 500,000 gallons per person (by 2010, we'll have an additional 27 million citizens). But water scarcity is not just an American problem. Asia has 60% of the world's population and only 30% of its fresh water. By 2050, according to the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, upwards of 2 billion people across the globe could face major water shortages.

Why the anticipated shortfall?

Across America, freshwater supplies are predicted to be inadequate to meet our needs due to many factors, including population growth, urban sprawl, waste/excessive use, and drought. Counter measures...conservation, gray

water use, etc... can be taken to address some of these problems. Others, like the devastating south-east drought, pose a larger challenge. By definition, a drought is a long period of consistently below average precipitation in a region (*Note: Drought is different from aridity, which is a permanent feature of climate in regions where low precipitation is the norm, as in a desert*). If it persists, the conditions surrounding a drought gradually worsen and its negative impact on the affected population -- its ecosystem and agriculture -- increases.

Drought mitigation strategies...

There are steps we can take to minimize the impact of drought conditions, including widespread voluntary conservation to prevent overuse of available supplies, using treated and purified recycled water, the collection and storage of rainwater from roofs and other catchments and, when water shortages are extreme, mandated regulation of water use.

Water is one commodity we simply cannot live without. Conservation is no longer something we merely talk about. It must become a necessary part of our daily routine. Think of it this way: **The water we conserve today can serve us tomorrow!**



1-2-3 SAVE!

Three things you must do to stop wasting water at home!

There are countless reasons to use our finite water resources more efficiently. Our population is rapidly growing, making the protection of those resources more important than ever.

Many places around the globe are facing serious drought, deteriorating water quality, aquifer depletion, and precious few alternatives for replacement supplies. In the past, the majority have considered 'water conservation' as a fallback or emergency response to supply shortages, but the realities of today will cause us to change that outdated mindset. We must understand that efficient use of our water supplies is, in fact, a viable, long-term supply option -- the water we conserve today can serve us tomorrow!

The days of cheap and plentiful water are a thing of the past. But controlling costs is not completely out of your hands. Simple changes to curb wasteful water use habits can have a real impact on your bill. So, which steps will provide the biggest return for your efforts...saving water and money? Here's what the experts suggest:

1. REPAIR THOSE LEAKS!

Did you know that the single greatest water waster in the home is a leaking toilet? A leak of one gallon every six minutes - not an unusual amount - adds up to ten gallons in an hour, or 240 gallons per day! That can double your total water bill - so take steps regularly to check for leaks, which are often poorly seated tank balls, worn valves or other minor components that are relatively easy

and inexpensive to fix.

2. UPDATE AND SAVE...

While we're on the subject of toilets, if yours are more than 15 years old (the water-guzzling, 5-7 gallon flush toilets), it's time for an update to the now-mandated (for manufacturers) 1.6 gallon per flush model. You will see immediate savings on your water bill and conserve lots of water in the process. And what about your shower? Are you taking advantage of the new water saving shower heads? If not, you might consider that simple change as well. Replacing old ones can save 500-800 gallons per month.



3. 'WASH AWAY' INEFFICIENT LAUNDRY AND KITCHEN HABITS...

The washing machine is the second largest water user in the home, accounting for as much as 22 percent of total residential water use. There are now a wide variety of high-efficiency (HE) clothes washers on the market, most with the front-loading drums. These new options can save you 50 percent in gallons of water used...from a conventional washer's 56 gallons per



load to the HE's 27 gallons, or less, per load. If a new washer isn't in your current budget, you can make minor changes in your habits to save water today: run only with full loads and select minimum volume settings and shorter wash cycles.

The water efficiency of dishwashers has improved steadily since the mid 1990s. Today's models use only half of what earlier models used...coming in at an impressive 7 gallons per load. Again, avoiding waste is key here. Using a dishwasher properly can actually consume less water than doing them by hand: use with full loads only, minimize pre-washing by scraping off food with a utensil - not water, make sure dishes are positioned to get good water flow during the cycle, and select the shortest practical cycle.

Mandatory changes in our current water supply and the rising water rates that accompany them are forces out of our control...but we can take charge in our own homes to keep our individual rates down. Water is the single most important resource on our planet. We can't take advantage of its supply or devalue its importance. Without it, our families, pets, wildlife and industry would not exist. Saving money is good...saving resources for ourselves and generations to come is immeasurable. ■

DON'T FLUSH YOUR MONEY AWAY -- FIX THAT LEAK!

We've all heard the slow drip of a faucet or the hiss of a leaking toilet, but have we really stopped to think about how much of a drain on our finances (and resources) those seemingly minor leaks can cause?

Think about this: *a leaking toilet tank can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day and cost you over 60 cents per day or almost \$20 a month and a faucet dripping at a rate of one drop per second, can waste up to 2,700 gallons per year!* Now, that's reason enough to take the simple steps necessary to find (and fix) those leaks.

Look for the Warning Signs

There are the obvious: a dripping faucet or a running toilet, but some leaks are a bit less conspicuous and may only be detected by closely monitoring your monthly water bill and your water meter. One of the first indications of a water leak is an unexplained increase in your monthly water bill. If the increase can't be tied back to a known spike in usage (house

guests, faucet left on, increased outdoor use, etc.), then the chance of a leak (either from a faucet, toilet or a break in the water line between the meter and the house) is high.

Another way to identify leaks is to monitor your water meter. To do so, you will need two hours of no water usage. First step: turn off all the water - inside and outside the house. Write down the reading on the meter and the position of the sweep hand, and wait at least two hours. At the end of this time, read the meter again. If the second reading is different from the first, that means water is still flowing through the meter and you've got a leak to find...and fix!

Start With the Toilet

Most household water leaks occur here and testing to find out if you have one is a snap. Just take your basic food coloring (any color) out of the pantry and you're ready to go. Flush the toilet and then put enough food coloring in the tank to color the water. Don't flush the toilet again for at least an



hour. If the water in the bowl of the toilet shows coloring, you have a leak that needs to be repaired.

Simple Fix for a Leaky Faucet

Leaky faucets...especially those with slow drips...can be ignored for long periods of time. It's easy to put off something that seems to have so little impact. But what if we told you that *even the slowest of drips can cost you over \$20 per year!* Remember to check faucets inside and outside the home. In most cases, leaks can be fixed by replacing a worn washer or "O" ring...it's simple and inexpensive.

Still Can't Find the Leak?

If you're sure there's a leak, but you're having trouble finding its source, also look at your water softener, sprinkler system or a swimming pool with an automatic fill device. Still no luck? It may be time to call in an expert. They will more than likely find the elusive leak and get it fixed. Taking care of the problem sooner than later is key. Every day a leak isn't fixed, valuable water and money are wasted. ■

CHECKING FOR TOILET LEAKS...EASY AS 1, 2, 3



1



2



3

East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry and FBCMUD#25 Partnering to Help Residents in Need

The District will partner with the East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry on two distinct fronts to help residents in our community. First, the District will host two food drives annually, in May and October 2008, to benefit residents in need. Bags will be distributed to each resident location the day before collection (May 1st and October 2nd) and District employees will collect donated food items the next day (May 2nd and October 3rd) to be delivered to the East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry. Residents in need of food and other items may contact the East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry for assistance.

Second, the East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry has agreed to establish a partnership relationship with the District that, for the first time, will enable residents of the District to add a voluntary contribution to their water bill payments to help our residents who may need temporary help paying water bills (Residents must designate how much they wish to contribute and add that amount to the total paid). The contributions collected by the District will be forwarded to the East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry,



Vickie Coates, (right), NEFBCHM Executive Director, with Nicole Cempa, FBCMUD#25.

where an account will be maintained to help pay water bills for District residents that qualify for temporary financial assistance. ■

VOTERS APPROVE FIRE PROTECTION PLAN



Growth can be viewed as a double-edged sword. On one hand, growth has enabled the District to improve and increase facilities and services while reducing taxes for 11 consecutive years. Alternatively, growth can be accompanied by increased demands

to include a growing need for life saving services. When the District was originally created, a single subdivision with 800 homes was well served by a volunteer fire station with a single location. However, the District has grown to include multiple subdivisions, schools, and businesses (over 3,400 connections and still growing) and the growth is accompanied by increased demands for fire and emergency services.

Residents of our District recognized the need for increased fire and emergency services and voters in Fort Bend County Municipal Utility District No. 25 approved the Fire Protection Plan in the recent election, which will enable the fire department to build a second location closer to our District. The future home of the Northeast Fort Bend County Volunteer Fire Department will be on the acreage (between Boss Gaston and West Airport) that was generously donated by the voters in Fort Bend County Municipal Utility District No. 25 when the Fire Protection plan was approved (there will be no increase in MUD taxes or the voluntary fire donation fee as a result of voter approval of the fire protection plan). ■

Stormwater Pollution...

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home, they should be stored properly to prevent leaks and access by children. Most cities have designated sites for the proper disposal of used chemicals.



Q. Why do we need to manage stormwater and polluted runoff?

A. As the saying goes, "We all live downstream." Communities that use surface water for their drinking supply must pay much more to clean up water with contaminants than clean water. In the majority of cases, stormwater either does not receive any treatment before it enters our waterways or it is inadequately treated.

Q. If it only affects streams and creeks, why should I care?

A. Streams and creeks feed into rivers, lakes and the ocean. We all drink water, so we are all affected when our water is polluted.

- When water treatment costs rise, the price of drinking water goes up.

- If you like to fish, swim or boat, you may have heard about or been affected by advisories warning you not to swim, fish or boat in a certain area because of unhealthy water or too much algae. The bottom line is that when our water is polluted, everyone is affected!



Q. What can I do to reduce the amount of stormwater pollution I contribute?

A. ■ If you own a car, maintain it so it does not leak oil or other fluids.

- Be sure to wash your automobiles on the grass or at a car wash so the dirt and soap do not flow down the driveway and into the nearest storm drain.

- If you own a yard, do not over fertilize your grass. Never apply fertilizers or pesticides before a heavy rain. If fertilizer falls onto driveways or sidewalks, sweep it up instead of hosing it away.

- Mulch or compost leaves and grass clippings if possible; if not, place bagged leaves in the yard at the curb, not in the street. Doing this keeps leaves out of the gutter, where they can wash into the nearest storm drain.

- Pet owners should pick up after their pets and dispose of pet waste in the garbage.

- Dispose of old or unwanted chemicals at household hazardous waste collections sites or events.

- Never put anything in a storm drain.

Please visit our website for more information...

www.waterdistrict25.com



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