

Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners

2019 Summary



Paddleboarder Potomac River Gorge
Photo by Michael Kircher

WORKING TOGETHER FOR HEALTHY STREAMS AND RIVERS

WWW.ONLYRAIN.ORG

Polluted stormwater runoff is the number one cause of poor water quality in streams and rivers in Northern Virginia. When it rains, the water runs off streets, driveways, yards and parking lots and mixes with pesticides, grass clippings, fertilizer, bacteria, and oil. All this pollution enters the storm drains on the street and is discharged directly to a stream. The runoff is not filtered or sent to a wastewater treatment facility.

To reduce the impacts of stormwater pollution, the Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners came together to change peoples' behavior through a public education campaign.

About the Partnership

The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners is composed of a group of local governments, drinking water and sanitation authorities, and

businesses that share the common goals to keep Northern Virginia residents healthy and safe by reducing the amount of pollution from stormwater runoff that reaches local creeks and rivers, and empower individuals to take action to reduce pollution.

To meet these goals, the Partners work together to:

- Identify high priority water quality issues for the region;
- Identify the target audience(s) for outreach;
- Educate the region's residents on simple ways to reduce pollution around their homes;
- Monitor changes in behavior through surveys and other data collection techniques; and
- Pilot new cost-effective opportunities for public outreach and education.

Membership is voluntary and each member makes an annual contribution to fund the program. By working together, the partners can leverage their funds to develop and place bilingual educational products with common messages and themes, thereby extending the campaign's reach.

Only Rain Down the Storm Drain is the motto of the partnership.

The 2019 campaign helped to satisfy MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) Phase I and Phase II permit requirements for stormwater education and documenting changes in behavior.

For more information visit www.onlyrain.org



2019 Campaign Overview and Accomplishments

In 2019, the Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners selected the following three high priority water quality issues to focus on for the Campaign:

- bacteria,
- nutrients, and
- chemical contaminants.

The Partners identified the target audiences for these issues as pet owners, homeowners with a lawn or garden, and home mechanics and do-it-yourselfers.

The campaign used television, print, internet advertising and the [Only Rain Down the Storm Drain](http://www.onlyrain.org) website to distribute messages linked to specific stormwater issues, such as proper pet waste disposal, responsible fertilizer use on lawns and gardens, and proper disposal of detergents, paints, stains, and auto fluids.

In addition to the multi-channel media campaign, partners participated in local events to raise awareness and encourage positive behavior change in residents. Television and internet ads featured the well-known national symbol of non-point source pollution; the rubber ducky.



33,591,119	Total household television impressions*
769,300	Total digital impressions (internet banner ads and in-stream video ads)
9,416	Number of times the ads aired from July 2018- June 2019
6,674	Visits to the www.onlyrain.org website
4,000	Pet waste bag dispensers distributed
500	Online Annual Survey Responses
>75%	Percent of target audience reached

Throughout the campaign year, the Partners made the following efforts to educate the public and promote awareness of stormwater pollution:

- From July 2018 through June 2019, aired four Public Service Announcements on 20 English language cable TV networks, and five Spanish language networks a total of 9,416 times. The ads featured messages on the importance of picking up pet waste and general household stormwater pollution reduction measures.
- Placed digital ads on Premium Digital Video websites that promote the same messages as the cable TV ads.

- Featured two full day, full page ads for Only Rain on the sign-in pages for Xfinity.com.



- In 2019, the Partners also implemented a strategy aimed at raising awareness about stormwater pollution called **"Write as Rain"**. The effort used stencils and an eco-friendly rain resistant spray (called RainWorks) to blanket the region's sidewalks and thoroughfares with fun and educational motivational

messages about stormwater that appear when the surfaces are wet. The goal of the effort was to raise public awareness about the environmental impacts of storm water pollution.



- Conducted an online survey of 500 Northern Virginia residents to determine the effectiveness of the ads, aid in directing the future efforts of the campaign, and to reveal any changes in behavior.
- Continued to update and maintain the Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners website.



Findings in the 2019 survey include:

General Awareness

- Roughly one third of respondents either don't know where storm water ends up or believes that it goes to a wastewater treatment plant.
- 15% of respondents recalled seeing the ad on TV after watching the video clip in the survey.
- Of those who recalled seeing the ads, 47 percent state they already take action to protect clean water, 32 percent state they now pick up their pet waste more often, 8 percent state that they now properly dispose of motor oil, and 25 percent state they plan to fertilize fewer times per year.
- When shown the Only Rain Down the Storm Drain logo, 57 percent of the respondents recognized it compared to 54 percent in 2013. This increase indicates that **awareness of the logo has increased over time.**
- Less than half of respondents feel at least somewhat confident that they would know where to report potential water pollution but, only 38 percent would report water pollution if they saw it. This suggests **there is a need for education on what pollution may look like and to encourage**

residents to report if they see something.

- One in five respondents stated they don't know they need to take action around their home to protect clean water.
- **The majority (64%) of respondents indicated that they were aware their locality has a specific place to drop off household hazardous waste.**
- About four in ten respondents felt they were **most prevented to take action to protect clean water because they don't know what to do.**
- The majority of respondents (64%) indicated that email newsletters with reminders and quick tips and/or online resources would help them take action to protect clean water.

Understanding Behaviors

In addition to capturing responses to questions regarding the effectiveness of the campaign, this year's survey honed in on the current behaviors and attitudes of Northern Virginia residents as they relate to pet waste management, lawn care, and motor oil disposal. Responses to these questions support the development of future messages and targeted promotion.

The most important reason dog owners are motivated to pick up their pet's waste is because "It's what good neighbors do". The number of respondents choosing "It causes water pollution" as the

main reason has fluctuated but was the third most common reason in 2019.

75% of lawn and garden owners fertilize their lawns at least once per year. **Among those who fertilize once a year, 14 percent fertilize in the spring and only six percent fertilize in the fall.** This suggests that there is room to educate residents of Northern Virginia that fertilizing in the fall is better for local waterways. **About half of the respondents reported using an herbicide to treat weeds in their lawn or garden.**

Among those who fertilize their lawn, 75 percent have never had or were not sure if their soil had been tested for fertility or pH and fifty five percent reported using a slow release fertilizer.

In a new question for 2018, after reading a description of a rain barrel, rain garden, and conservation landscaping, respondents were asked if they had implemented these features at their home or had heard about them. Six percent reported having a rain barrel, while two percent reported having a rain garden, and seven percent reported having conservation landscapes in their yard. This indicates **there is a significant opportunity to continue to promote these practices to homeowners.**

Consistent with past years, the majority of respondents take their vehicle to a service station for oil changes (83%) or take used oil to a gas station or hazmat facility for recycling (8%). **Approximately four percent of Northern Virginians reported storing used motor oil in their garage, placing it in the trash or dumping it down the storm drain, sink or on the ground.**

NORTHERN VIRGINIA 2019 WATER QUALITY SURVEY

Although the entirety of the Northern Virginia region is in the Potomac River watershed, many Northern Virginians are underinformed about actions they can take to reduce pollution in stormwater runoff.



Where do you believe stormwater goes?

68% of NoVA residents think it eventually ends up in the Potomac River or Chesapeake Bay 

AND

Around 1/3 of NoVA residents either don't know where it goes or believe **it goes to a wastewater treatment plant.**

 **42%**

of Northern Virginians feel at least somewhat confident that they would know where to **report potential water pollution.**

BUT ONLY 38% would report water pollution if they saw it.



About four in ten residents of Northern Virginia feel they are most **prevented from taking action** to protect clean water because they **DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.**

Although improperly disposed pet waste is a major source of bacteria in stormwater,

ONLY 15%

of dog owners in Northern Virginia believe **water pollution** is the most important reason to pick up after your pet.

About **1/4** of NoVA residents have seen or received **information about reducing water pollution** in the past 12 months.

75% of lawn owners in Northern Virginia **fertilize** their lawn at least once a year.

ONLY 6% fertilize once in the Fall, even though fertilizing **once a year in the fall** is better for local waterways. 

 **30%** of car/truck owners wash their car/truck **at home.**

40%

use **environmentally friendly** detergent.

28%

wash on the grass or other **surface that absorbs water.**

10%

don't use any detergent - **only water.**

About 1/3 of NoVA residents are **unaware** of whether their locality has a specific place to drop off



HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

One in five Northern Virginians



ARE INTERESTED IN GETTING A RAIN BARREL.

2019 Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners

Fairfax County | Arlington County | Loudoun County | Stafford County | Fairfax Water |
City of Alexandria | City of Fairfax | Town of Leesburg |
Town of Dumfries | Doody Calls | Northern Virginia Regional Commission | George Mason University | Virginia
Coastal Zone Management Program | Fairfax County Public Schools | Prince William County Public Schools |
Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District



Only Rain Down the Drain

www.onlyrain.org

For more information:

Corey Miles
Senior Environmental
Planner
703-642-4625
3040 Williams Drive, Suite
200
Fairfax, VA 22031
cmiles@novaregion.org



Summary prepared by NVRC on behalf of the Partners

August, 2019