

Charting a course for watershed improvement

Every person can make a difference, one drop at a time

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Kevin Hoffman/The Mercury

The Schuylkill Action Network will spend money planting native vegetation along streams to create riparian buffers, shown at left, being planted at Century Oak Farm in East Nantmeal. It is one of the best ways to prevent pollution from entering streams and drinking water. One of the best ways to prevent flooding and re-charge groundwater is to install porous pavement. Below right, John Hoekstra demonstrates how water penetrates the parking lot at Green Valleys Association.

So you're worried about the quality and quantity of water in our watershed, but you don't know what to do about it.

Certainly, the folks at Schuylkill Action Network seem to have things under control, right?

The truth is, they can't do anything without you.

"What we have to do in the Schuylkill now is chart a course," said Christopher Crockett, who manages the watershed protection office of the Philadelphia Water Department.

“We have to begin making the changes that will make significant improvements in source water quality and not this slow decline,” he said. “A lot of individuals doing little things can make a big difference.”

“There is a significant amount of drinking water in a compromised state and it needs help, and a lot of what needs to be done people can do right in their own backyards,” said Bern Sweeney, director and senior research scientist at the Stroud Water Research Center.

“The cause of the problem is a whole bunch of little problems and the solution is a whole bunch of little fixes,” he said.

Don Welsh, who runs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency region that includes Pennsylvania, put it this way: “For people in the watershed, we want them to understand something on their property, something that could affect supply for two million ” “A lot of it is common sense,” said Crockett.

“Don’t dump your used oil down the storm drain. Don’t empty half a bottle of Round-up . on your driveway weeds a half hour before a rainstorm, things like that.”

That message is being put out through education efforts fueled by the new stormwater rules.

Pottstown has placed medallions on storm water intakes to remind people that the water running along that gutter — or off the car they’re washing in the street — drains into the Schuylkill River.

People can also help by joining grassroots groups in the area that are involved in water protection; or by telling other people about the easy things they can do to protect the watershed in which they live.

Doing the right thing often can save money, too.

For example, diverting the water from roof gutters into a rain barrel can cut down on the water bill. Planting native plants that don’t require fertilizer saves the cost of buying it.

After all, 1,000 square feet of lawn requires 10,000 gallons of water every summer. Each year, about 80 million pounds of pesticides and more than 100 million tons of fertilizers are applied to American lawns.

Businesses are also invited to get into the act.

In 1989, McNeil CSP of Fort Washington, a specialty pharmaceutical subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson, spent \$59,000 on converting 24 acres of “fine lawn,” to tall grass and a seeded wildflower meadow, according to Estuary News.

Over an 11-year period, the company saved more than \$133,500 in reduced fertilizer, equipment and labor costs.



Daniel P. Creighton/The Mercury

Many of us doing little things can make a big difference

Here are a couple of conservation suggestions provided by the Delaware River Basin Commission:

- Save three to five gallons a minute for each minute you cut out of a shower.
- Don't run the water while shaving, washing your hands or brushing your teeth, saving two to three gallons a minute.
- Check your water meter and see how much water you use. A good rule of thumb is 50 to 60 gallons per day per person in a household.
- Fix slow drips and leaky faucets that waste 15 to 20 gallons of water per day.
- Install front-loading washing machines and reduce water usage by 40 percent.
- Use a self closing nozzle on your hose.
- Position your gutters so rain runs into a rain barrel, a gravel infiltration or into the lawn or garden, not into the driveway.
- Don't water lawns during the heat of the day.

Because each little bit hurts the larger whole, each little change helps.

"We need to use water like we're living on a sailboat," said Bern Sweeney, director of the Stroud Water Research Center.

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