

MAKING A SPLASH: THE CLEAN WATER CAMPAIGN FROM GRASSROOTS TO MASS MEDIA

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Abstract. The Clean Water Campaign, a cooperative effort spearheaded by local governments, was designed to consolidate efforts of local governments to raise awareness of stormwater pollution and provide solutions to prevent water pollution. Through a public awareness campaign consisting of grassroots endeavors and a mass media campaign, the Clean Water Campaign has successfully reached millions of residents in metro Atlanta through the cooperation of local governments, partnering organizations and various media outlets with information about the protection of water resources. Also important has been the involvement of businesses within the region, using the resources of partners to leverage additional exposure of Campaign programs. Annual polling has shown an increased level of awareness and interest in water quality and water pollution prevention, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the Campaign's initiatives. Messages and efforts are working. Learning about the programs, measures taken and strategies for reaching a large audience through such an effort can assist other local governments to develop similar programs in their communities.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to describe the development and major accomplishments of the Clean Water Campaign. The Clean Water Campaign is a public awareness and education effort to address nonpoint source water pollution. It is a cooperative, multi-agency initiative spearheaded by local governments in metro Atlanta, supported by the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District and managed by the Atlanta Regional Commission.

Within metropolitan Atlanta, more than 1,000 stream miles in the 16-county area of metro Atlanta are impaired and fail to meet water quality standards due to polluted stormwater runoff. Rainwater runs off rooftops, lawns, parking lots, streets and driveways, picking up pollutants and debris and carrying them into storm drains or directly into waterways. This is a critical problem for metro Atlanta, as we rely on a finite supply of surface water sources for most of our drinking water supplies. In addition, we depend on our lakes and streams for fishing,

boating and contact recreation, which is a billion dollar a year industry in the region (Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division). The primary source of this pollution is not wastewater or industrial discharges (known as "point" sources), but is the result of many actions taken at our homes and businesses. This "nonpoint" source pollution, coming from many diffuse sources, is the greatest threat to the health and viability of our water resources.

The challenge of the Clean Water Campaign is to educate residents and businesses in the 16-county area about ways to reduce stormwater pollution and ultimately, to change behavior to affect the health of area water bodies.

WATER RESOURCES AND A GROWING POPULATION

The Federal Clean Water Act requires that "non-point sources" of pollution be controlled. The federal National Pollution Discharge Elimination System or NPDES permit system was amended in 1987 to address nonpoint source pollution and stormwater runoff. These amendments required that large, medium and certain smaller jurisdictions obtain an NPDES permit for their municipal storm sewer systems. In Georgia, the state Environmental Protection Division (EPD) issues these permits.

In discussions with EPD through the Atlanta Regional Stormwater Management Task Force, the first metro Atlanta permittees (NPDES Phase I, for jurisdictions with a high population) determined that a regional public information and education program, undertaken collectively by the local governments in the Atlanta region, would be better able to communicate its message to all citizens by providing a consistent regional message, educational materials and activities. The governments agreed to a cost-share formula that would fund a regional program facilitated by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC).

The Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District board adopted the existing Clean Water Campaign as a primary vehicle for educating the public about stormwater pollution, watershed problems, and solutions. The campaign has a public awareness goal that is designed to reach 75-90 percent of metro residents by the end of

2006 with clear and concise water quality messages. The District, staffed by ARC, combined efforts and built upon the existing resources of the Clean Water Campaign to reach the larger audience of the 16-counties Metropolitan North Georgia region.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

The Clean Water Campaign includes three major elements: a public awareness campaign, outreach and education to key target groups and primary and secondary education. These elements are regularly addressed and implemented through local governments on the District's Technical Coordinating Committee's Education Subcommittee.

Public Awareness Campaign

The *mass media campaign* is a wide reaching awareness effort to reach the public with messages on stormwater pollution through television, billboards and interactive media.

The Campaign developed a series of public service announcements at a fraction of the cost by creating some ads in-house and by hiring consultants through a competitive process to develop ads. The public service announcements have run on television, on billboards, in movie theaters and on government access channels.

The Clean Water Campaign leveraged buying power through the purchase of a modest amount of television, billboard and movie theater ads with companies that provided additional public service announcements. The Clean Water Campaign purchased 142 television spots and received 208 spots in public service airtime. In 2004, the media campaign reached an estimated 4 million viewers at least 10 times through the course of the run.

The Campaign utilized the resources of television stations and other media outlets by having the ability to purchase advertisements to receive a greater amount of public service announcements and opportunities. The Campaign became an official partner of one television station by receiving 10,000 brochures that were distributed at dozens of the stations largest advertisers' businesses. Two stations also created public service announcements featuring their chief meteorologists. As a summer promotion, a station distributed thousands of preprinted cards with information about the Clean Water Campaign at movie theaters. In addition, stations were willing to provide public service airtime through banners and listings on their website. In one partnership, a station gave six months of free web advertisements that reached over 1.5 million visitors.

Funding for the public awareness campaign initially came from local governments. The Campaign actively sought grants through foundations to support the media

efforts and was awarded one grant for a television campaign and another for billboards.

In addition to television ads, the Campaign purchased billboard and movie theater advertisements reaching hundreds of thousands of people each day with pollution prevention messages. The billboard and movie theater advertisements were consistent with those of the TV spots. The ads ran during high peak times and at highly visible locations. The ads ran in many counties surrounding metro Atlanta reaching a wide demographic range and a large number of residents. The billboards and the movie theater advertisements ran for several months during the time that television public service announcements ran and extend past the TV campaigns. The movie theater and billboard ads served as vehicles to sustain the momentum of the Campaign. In addition, the companies were able to provide the Clean Water Campaign with public service airtime to yield a broader reach.

The key to success of the Clean Water Campaign was through the placement of spots during a season of high viewership with large-scale events such as the Olympic Games and the Presidential Debates airing on TV. Airtime was purchased in other higher viewing seasons and timeslots. In addition, the Campaign purchased billboards (Figure 1) in some in high traffic areas along interstates, medium sized billboards and bus shelter ads throughout the region, reaching a large population and demographic range.

In addition to working with commercial television stations, the Clean Water Campaign utilized local jurisdictions' resources to run public service announcements on government access channels. Some stations interviewed workshop presenters and attendees as programs on their station. The Campaign has also made on-air appearances through television and radio stations.

Through *articles and media relations*, the Campaign has reached residents and businesses at no additional



Figure 1. Billboard artwork example.

costs. Monthly topics were identified by the Education Subcommittee to provide messages related to that subject in newspapers, magazines, radio stations and other media channels. Hundreds of articles have appeared in local newspapers throughout the course of the Campaign.

A *website*, www.cleanwatercampaign.com, was developed as a comprehensive source of information for visitors to access information on water pollution. The website provides in-depth layers of information that can be shared with millions of residents through grassroots marketing and traditional media. The Clean Water Campaign website is referenced as a source of information on brochures, in advertisements, for people searching for additional information on water pollution prevention, etc. The website has been viewed over one million times since 2002. The website's popularity has grown over 240% since its launch in 2001.

Other pieces of the public awareness campaign include promotional items (magnets and raindrop stress figures) and bill inserts/messages. Magnets were used to reflect billboard messages and to direct people to the Campaign website.

Messages of the Public Awareness Campaign

The Clean Water Campaign uses a list of 10 simple messages called the "Top 10 Things You Can Do To Be a Solution to Water Pollution" as the foundational messages used throughout the public awareness campaign and incorporated into the outreach and education to key target groups and in primary and secondary education elements. The Top 10 list is:

1. Never dump anything on the street, down a storm drain or drainage ditch.
2. Scoop up after your pet. Bag it and throw it away in the trash.
3. Compost or bag grass clippings and leaves for curbside collection.
4. Use fertilizers and pesticides sparingly. Do not apply on paved areas.
5. Check your vehicles for leaks and repair them.
6. Reduce, reuse and recycle the amount of cleaning and maintenance chemicals used at home.
7. Recycle motor oil and other vehicle fluids.
8. Throw litter in its place.
9. Wash cars at a commercial car wash or on a grassy area, not your driveway.
10. Tell a friend or neighbor about how to prevent stormwater pollution and get involved.

Outreach and Education to Key Target Groups

As part of the outreach and education effort to key target groups, the Clean Water Campaign uses *brochures and fact sheets* as tools for reaching audiences at a grassroots level to cover residential and business topics

related to stormwater pollution prevention. The brochures have been distributed through local governments, partnering organizations and businesses. The brochure topics include an introduction to stormwater pollution, reducing household hazardous waste, rain gardens, commercial landscaping, septic tank maintenance, storm drain stenciling, pet waste, composting, best practices for restaurants, planting trees to protect streams, auto service, do-it-yourself auto service and a series of best management practices for lawn maintenance for residents. The brochures serve as a method of tracking the number of actual people reached through the campaign. The campaign currently has over 20 brochures on different topics (in English and Spanish) and has distributed more than 150,000 brochures since the Campaign's launch. Several brochures were created in partnership with organizations and governments.

Outreach to target groups has also accomplished through grassroots *educational workshops*. Thousands of residents have been reached over the years through the Campaign workshops. The topics covered in the workshops are rain gardens, Xeriscaping, composting, lawn care, septic tank maintenance and care, auto service, planting trees to protect streams and composting. The workshops have been repeated in counties surrounding metro Atlanta. The highest attendance for one event had 400 people for a lawn care workshop, with a close second of 380 people to a septic tank workshop in the same county. The highest attended workshops are septic tank, rain garden and lawn care. A speakers' bureau has spun off the popular workshop series. The workshops were recorded on video and have aired on local government access channels. One jurisdiction took the recorded videos and provided them to libraries for use. The workshops would not be possible without the partnership of the University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service Agents, Georgia Tech Research Institute and the GECAP Program, board of health agents, the Pollution Prevention Assistance Division (P²AD) and other partnering organizations.

Primary and Secondary Education

The third element of the Campaign, *primary and secondary education*, has enabled the Campaign to reach school-aged students through materials, curriculum, events and appearances by the Campaign mascot. The Clean Water Campaign supports the development and incorporation of water curriculum into schools through partnerships with ProjectWET and the Georgia Water Wise Council.

SUCCESS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The Clean Water Campaign conducts an annual poll to measure the effectiveness of the overall Campaign. The

questions asked related directly to the messages broadcasted or shared through grassroots and various forms of media. The number of people who identified stormwater runoff as the main source of water pollution over factories/industrial discharges and over landfills grew from 9.5 percent to 21.5 percent (126% change) between 2001 and 2004. Several questions asked respondents about whether or not they would change certain behaviors if they knew that it would result in preventing water pollution. The number of people who were very likely to check their cars for leaks grew from 68 percent to 83.8 percent. The number of people who were very likely to pick-up after their pets to prevent water pollution grew from 32.2 percent to 55.8 percent (73% change). The number of people who are very likely to recycle motor oil changed from 55 percent to 68.2 percent. The number of people who have heard about the Clean Water Campaign grew from 49 percent to 71 percent. The sources for hearing the Campaign's messages reflected the year's efforts with an increase in the number of people who heard the messages via TV grew from 29.8 percent to 49.5 percent (a change of 66%).

CONCLUSION

The Clean Water Campaign has successfully reached millions of residents in metro Atlanta through the cooperation of local governments, partnering organizations and various media outlets. The success of the Campaign stems from the partnerships and grassroots efforts that provide the substance and technical assistance as well as conduits to disseminate materials and information. The Clean Water Campaign has used corporate resources to leverage additional exposure for Campaign programs. Annual polling has shown an increased level of awareness and interest in water quality and water pollution prevention, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the Campaign's initiatives. The level of awareness and interest in the topic has steadily increased to prove that the messages and efforts are working.

SELECTED REFERENCES

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(www.cleanwatercampaign.com)
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