

What is the Partnership for Water Quality?

The Partnership is a collaborative effort between:

- Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Allen County Surveyor's Office
- City of Fort Wayne Water Resources
- City of New Haven Utilities
- Fort Wayne/Allen County Health Dept.
- Maumee River Basin Commission
- Saint Joseph River Watershed Initiative (Maumee River)

The Partnership is the mutual education and outreach effort for these different agencies. The role the Partnership plays in this effort takes many different forms. My full title as the Water Resource Education Specialist works out pretty much like it sounds. Sometimes this is fairly straightforward; staffing an information booth, creating and distributing brochures, and talking to public and special interest groups. Other times it can become unconventional; acting as "Dr. I.C. Coldwater", or running Project WET activities for kids (and sometimes adults). Mostly, the education and outreach are extensions of the EPA Phase II Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) program.

Working with all of the agencies within the Partnership and all of the related agencies creates an abbreviation and acronym-rich language that can be tough for laypeople to decipher. For example, I can be talking about CAFOs (Confined Animal Feeding Operations) and the risks they present to water quality in one conversation, turn around and speak with someone about CSOs (Combined Sewer Overflows) the next moment.

One of the things I've learned in my time in the private sector is that you must tailor your message to fit the audience you're trying to reach. This is a critical point in advertising and often gets overlooked by smaller not-for-profits and government agencies. So when I first signed on here, I decided to use the "private-sector" model to its maximum effect. What this means is that no one brochure, flier, strategy or campaign will "reach" across all or most of our respective demographics.

Reaching across to your patronage or "market" is made more difficult when you have seven different partners at a board meeting. Sometimes what may seem to be the best course of action for a campaign can seem too "heavy-handed," progressive or sensitive for all interests involved. Even if the majority of partners agree most of the time, certain issues might still "paint" the dissenters as the "odd ones out." Singling out groups and individuals does not make for a long-lived, effective partnership.

Balancing the long-term goals and the short-term needs of organizations is most problematic. At the end of the day, though, it is a strategy that ensures the survival and continued relevance of agencies and organizations. Partnering is crucial for the future of any meaningful objective. This union usually means someone, thing, or concept will be open for compromise at some point in time. If we are going to progress past the pundits and "shouting heads" and rediscover true dialogue, we must be willing to stop, listen and consider the validity of other arguments. This is a basic tenet of science and, to me, the foundation of true learning.

Some of the tools in the Water Resource Education toolbox are:

- A small library of DVDs, videos, CDs and other resource books
- Storm Water Activity Book (SWAB): coloring book (available nationally) for K-4 kids
- Enviroscape Storm Water module
- Project WET (Water Education for Teachers) modules and activities
- www.acwater.org website (currently under revision and repair)

Newsletters and informational articles

“Dr. I.C. Coldwater:” A “living history” medicine-show character speaking about water

Presence at expos, conferences, fairs and neighborhood meetings

Some of the projects the Partnership participates in are:

Consultant, Co-writer & Project Manager of:

“A Watershed Mentality” (Great Lakes Commission/PBS sedimentation video) and

“Green Sells” Construction Best Management Practices DVD

Camp Scott Storm Water Mitigation Wetland education curriculum and tours

Southtown Wetland Education Resources

Water Quality Awareness Survey

Storm Drain Marking Program: educating and enlisting neighborhood groups to mark local drains

Ongoing website maintenance

Watershed Team meetings: designed to “flush out” inefficiencies and identify mutual project areas

Greenway Signage Committee: working to increase public awareness of watershed issues

Cultivation of a Volunteer Corps: Storm drain marking, Speaker’s Bureau, fairs and expos, etc...

These, and other meetings and tasks that happen along the way

I want to hear from the others in the audience who share the task of water resource education and outreach. I hope that what I have mentioned here helps everyone, at some level, in attaining our mutual goal of a vital and sustainable Great Lakes watershed.

Thanks for this opportunity!

Matt