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**Survey Shows Progress by
Regional Stormwater Public Education Campaign**

One collaborative Chittenden County group charged with helping clean up Lake Champlain is today highlighting its success in educating the public on the harmful effects of storm water runoff on the health of area waterways.

A Chittenden County Regional Stormwater Education Program (RSEP) survey conducted late last year shows that county residents have a greater understanding than they did five years ago of where storm water goes and how their daily actions affect the levels of contaminated runoff in local waterways.

In 2003, RSEP was formed through the efforts of several of the county's municipalities and several other entities. It first conducted a public awareness survey and then launched a public education program with the goal of getting area residents personally involved in reducing storm water pollution in Lake Champlain.

Today, RSEP is celebrating its fifth year with the release of results from the follow-up survey confirming the group's progress on several issues:

- More residents (an increase from 20 percent to 33 percent) know that storm water runs unfiltered directly into waterways; fewer residents (12 percent compared with 27 percent) have no idea where storm water goes. Storm drains empty into rivers and streams, and those streams and rivers flow into Lake Champlain without treatment.
- Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents (72.6 percent) said they throw their pet waste in the trash when walking their dogs; in 2003, less than two-thirds (62 percent) of county residents surveyed did the same. Dog and cat pet waste add excessive nutrients and bacterial pollution to water, decreasing water quality, causing unpleasant odors and causing human health problems. A common result of this is the closing of beaches due to high e. coli levels.
- The percentage of respondents who understand the impact of hosing household driveway debris into the street more than doubled, from 10 percent in 2003 to 21.6 percent in 2007. Even biodegradable soaps can be toxic to fish and wildlife; washing your car in your driveway or hosing down debris from paved surfaces into the street contributes to lake contamination and fish die-offs.

RSEP is a collaborative effort among nine Chittenden County municipalities (Shelburne, South Burlington, Burlington, Winooski, Colchester, Milton, Essex Junction, Essex, and Williston) and three other entities – Burlington International Airport, the University of Vermont and the Vermont Agency of Transportation. The effort is conducted as part of public education measures required by federal Environmental Protection Agency storm water system permits.

“One important thing to remember is that we are making progress in areas that don’t make headlines,” said Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director for the Town of Essex. “We hear a lot about the lack of action towards clean-up of Lake Champlain. But things are being done – it will just take time.”

“This is a responsibility that all Vermont residents share. Municipal and state governments have changed their behavior, and one of our goals is to help Vermonters understand how they can change theirs.”

The RSEP uses a combination of television, radio, print, a program Web site, and educational events to distribute messages linked to specific storm water problems, namely pet waste, home projects, toxic home chemicals, car washing, erosion and fertilizer. The group has committed to another five years of cooperative effort and looks to further refine its educational messages.

The post-campaign survey included 454 responses and has a reliability of +/- 5 percent.

Non-voting members of the RSEP include the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, the Champlain Water District and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission which coordinates the RSEP. For more information about the RSEP and stormwater, visit www.smartwaterways.org.

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