



SMART About Water Program Comes to an End

In 2008, the National Environmental Services Center (NESC) launched Smart About Water, a project in partnership with the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) designed to assist small communities in their efforts to protect drinking water quality. Funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the project helped develop and provide training and technical assistance about source water and wellhead protection, and focused on untreated wastewater from failing septic and sewer systems, the largest contributor to water quality degradation.

The first step of the project was training RCAP field staff, who then conducted 112 trainings in 42 states and U.S. Territories. Altogether, SMART trained 1,479 participants representing 683 small and very small drinking water systems throughout the nation. Of special interest were the 23 Trailblazer Communities, selected by RCAP based on their readiness to prepare source water and wellhead protection plans.

In the Northeast, RCAP Solutions undertook two Technical Assistance (“Trailblazer”) projects.

- **Waukegan Watershed Advisory Committee (Meredith, NH).**

Assistance with distribution of EPA’s Homeowners Guide to Septic Systems, and development of other materials, including a BMP Guide and a survey; and ongoing attendance at monthly meetings. RCAP helped to provide information regarding provisions in NH Administrative Rules to support efforts in local regulation of septic systems. Outcomes: an increased momentum for moving toward awareness in local officials of the threat to drinking water quality from aging and substandard septic systems near shoreline of Meredith’s surface water source; increased public awareness (measured by survey returns) about BMP’s for septic system operation and maintenance; building of technical capacity through RCAP’s information gathering and sharing.

- **Green Mountain Conservation Group (Effingham, NH).**

Technical Assistance to a watershed association active in the Ossipee aquifer in E. Central, NH. RCAP was able to gain approval from US EPA and NESC to purchase ARCVIEW GIS for the organization, which has demonstrated the need and applications for the GIS. RCAP also provided a 3-hour training in the use of the GIS, again funded by the SMART about Water Program. There is a pending article in On Tap regarding this activity. Outcome: This will help them in their efforts to serve the five communities in the watershed through the production of maps to support their educational efforts. Increase in expertise in GIS within an environmental activist group with a strong history of NH DES support.

Training in Source Water Protection Planning

Trainings were delivered to 200 individuals in SMART target audiences in the Northeast, which included: (Public Water System owner/operators; elected officials; homeowners associations; landowners; civic groups; watershed groups; and septic system professionals). Training locations and topics included: Boothbay, Maine (2 training sessions, SWP Planning (12 attendees) and septic system maintenance for homeowners – 25 attendees); Mount Washington Valley, NH (SWP Planning – 23 attendees); Worcester County, MA (SWP Planning and Septic system maintenance for homeowners; 2 attendees, representing 18 systems in MA and NH); Block Island, RI (Septic system maintenance for homeowners, 7 attendees); Danielson, CT (SWP Planning, 20 attendees); Milford, CT (Septic system maintenance for homeowners- Training for Candlewood Lake Authority staffers – 3 attendees); VT (1 Training in Franklin, VT, on decentralized water management around Lake Champlain - attended by 34 persons); PA (1 Training in Martinsburg on SWP Planning 12 attendees) and one training each in Puerto Rico, NY and NJ.

Outcomes: Increased awareness through training and distribution of educational materials among the target audience of SWP Planning, their Source Water Assessments, and the threat to water quality from failing septic systems. Increased capacity among drinking water systems to pursue SWP activities.

RCAP Solutions assisted the organization and used SMART funds in preparing and distributing a 3-fold flyer, describing BMP's for owners and users of septic systems.

Outcome: A more informed public with up-to-date information on septic system maintenance, which may result in a lowering of non-point source pollution in the Ossipee Aquifer.

The SMART about Water Program allowed RCAP Solutions to assist the group with proposal preparation for their next year of funding, as well as give technical advice and participation with their Ossipee Aquifer Steering Committee.

Outcome: Increased TMF Capacity through their association with RCAP technical assistance. Continued RCAP (and, by extension, EPA) support in their efforts toward aquifer conservation.

The SMART project officially ended September 30, 2009, although most of the project materials are still available on the SMART About Water Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu/smart. In fact, more than 25,000 people still visit the site each month and downloads of SMART information and training aids have increased each month since the site launched. NESC intends to remain engaged in source water protection efforts and is active in the EPA Source Water Collaborative.

"On behalf of NESC, we would like to thank all the people who made this project a success," says Gerald Iwan, Ph.D., NESC's director, "especially Robert Stewart in the national RCAP office and Steve Ainsworth with EPA'S Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water. We have seen a tremendous interest in source water from around the country. Thousands of communities recognize that water quality is essential to their well being and efforts to assist them in protecting their sources of water is a good investment. If you have benefitted from the SMART program or would like to see EPA devote more support to continue the activities begun under SMART, we'd love to hear from you."

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