

Public Education and Outreach Minimum Control Measure



This fact sheet profiles the Public Education and Outreach minimum control measure, one of six program areas an operator of a Phase II regulated small municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) is required to address as part of its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) stormwater permit. This fact sheet offers some general considerations on strategies used by MS4s to implement public education and outreach programs and comply with their relevant permit requirements. It is important to keep in mind that the regulated small MS4 operator typically has a great deal of flexibility in choosing exactly how to satisfy the public education and outreach requirements in its NPDES permit.

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Why Is Public Education and Outreach Necessary?

An informed and knowledgeable community is crucial to the success of an MS4 stormwater management program since it helps to ensure the following:

- **Greater support** for the program as the public gains a greater understanding of the reasons why it is necessary and important. Public support is particularly beneficial when operators of small MS4s attempt to institute work on new funding initiatives for the program or seek volunteers to help implement the program.
- **Greater compliance** with the program as the public becomes aware of the personal responsibilities expected of them and others in the community, including the individual actions they can take to protect or improve the quality of area waters.

What Is Required?

All permitted small MS4s are required to implement public education programs that distribute educational materials to the community, or conduct equivalent outreach activities, about the impacts of stormwater discharges on local waterbodies and the steps that can be taken to reduce stormwater pollution.

Each permit specifies the minimum elements that must be included in each MS4's public education and outreach program (e.g., specific types of audiences to reach out to, particular stormwater pollution subjects to cover, number of events to sponsor or publications to distribute). These elements will differ from state to state although all permits will share the bottom-line requirement that the MS4 must implement a public education program that is tailored to the specific stormwater pollution control problems facing the community.

EPA has compiled several examples from federal and state MS4 permits that address the public education and outreach minimum control measure. These examples are included in a series of permit compendia available on EPA's stormwater website. See particularly Section A (Public Education and Outreach) in the EPA's [*Compendium of MS4 Permitting Approaches – Part 1: Six Minimum Control Measures*](#).

EPA has also recently published a collection of communications tools, referred to as *Stormwater Smart*, that MS4s can use to promote the value of sound stormwater management and that can be used as part of their public education and outreach campaigns. The *Stormwater Smart* collection of materials includes brochures, infographics, one-pagers, and social media posts to educate the public, as well as a template for presentations to city officials and community leaders about the benefits of stormwater management. For more information, refer to EPA's *Stormwater Smart* webpage at <https://www.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater-smart-outreach-tools>.

Considerations in Implementing Public Education and Outreach Programs

Several of the considerations for successful implementation of a public education and outreach program include the following:

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Forming Partnerships

Operators of regulated small MS4s should consider utilizing partnerships with other governmental entities to fulfill public education and outreach requirements. It is generally more cost-effective to use an existing program, or to develop a new regional or state-wide education program, than to have numerous operators developing their own local programs. Consideration should also be given to seeking assistance from nongovernmental organizations (e.g., environmental, civic, and industrial organizations), since many already have educational materials and perform outreach activities.

Using Educational Materials and Strategies

Operators of regulated small MS4s may find it helpful to use stormwater educational information provided by their state, tribe, EPA region, or environmental, public interest, or trade organizations instead of developing their own materials to implement their public education and outreach program. Operators should strive to make their materials and activities relevant to local situations and issues, and incorporate a variety of strategies to ensure maximum coverage. Some examples include:

- **Brochures or fact sheets** for general public and specific audiences.
- **Recreational guides** to educate groups such as golfers, hikers, paddlers, climbers, fishermen, and campers.
- **Alternative information sources**, such as websites, bumper stickers, refrigerator magnets, posters for bus and subway stops, and restaurant placemats.
- **A library of educational materials** for community and school groups.
- **Volunteer citizen educators** to staff a **public education task force**.
- **Event participation** with educational displays at home shows and community festivals.
- **Educational programs** for school-age children.
- **Stormwater hotlines** for information and for citizen reporting of polluters.
- **Economic incentives** to citizens and businesses (e.g., rebates to homeowners purchasing mulching lawnmowers or biodegradable lawn products).
- **Tributary signage** to increase public awareness of local water resources.

Reaching Diverse Audiences

Consider using a mix of appropriate local strategies to address the viewpoints and concerns of a variety of audiences and communities, including minority and disadvantaged communities, as well as children. Printing posters and brochures in more than one language or posting large warning signs (e.g., cautioning against fishing or swimming) near storm sewer outfalls are methods that can be used to reach audiences less likely to read standard materials. Directing materials or outreach programs toward specific groups of commercial, industrial, and institutional entities likely to have significant stormwater impacts is also recommended. For example, information could be provided to restaurants on the effects of grease on the clogging of storm drains and to auto garages on the effects of dumping used oil into storm drains.

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For Additional Information

Contacts

A list of contacts for the U.S. EPA's Office of Wastewater Management (Headquarters), each EPA regional office, and state office is located at:
<https://www.epa.gov/npdes/contact-us-stormwater>

Your NPDES Permitting Authority

Most states and territories are authorized to administer the NPDES Program, except the following, for which EPA is the permitting authority:

- American Samoa
- District of Columbia
- Guam
- Johnston Atoll
- Massachusetts
- Midway and Wake Islands
- New Hampshire
- New Mexico
- Northern Mariana Islands
- Puerto Rico
- Most Indian country lands

Reference Documents

- [EPA's Stormwater Website](#)
- [Stormwater Phase II Final Rule \(64 FR 68722\)](#)
- [Final MS4 General Permit Remand Rule \(81 FR 89320\)](#)
- [Final Small MS4 Urbanized Area Clarification \(88 FR 37994\)](#)
- [Phase II Final Rule Fact Sheet Series](#)
- [National Menu of Best Management Practices for Stormwater Phase II](#)
- [Stormwater Smart Outreach Tools](#)
- [MS4 Permits – Compendium of Clear, Specific, and Measurable Permitting Examples](#)

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