



## RETHINK RUNOFF

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Survey shows improved actions by public to combat stormwater runoff; 15-year effort in regional collaboration paying dividends

*Winooski, VT* – For the past 15 years, Rethink Runoff (formally known as the Chittenden County Regional Stormwater Education Program), a regional stormwater outreach, education and participation campaign formed by nine municipalities and three organizations subject to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS-4) permit requirements has pooled their resources to develop and implement annual social marketing campaigns and events to encourage best practices that combat the effects of stormwater runoff. A recent survey commissioned by this group and conducted by Castleton University's Polling Institute was implemented from January-March 2018 from a sample of residents from the nine MS-4 municipalities: Milton, Colchester, Winooski, Burlington, Essex Junction, Essex, Williston, South Burlington and Shelburne. This survey was the fifth one commissioned by this group and highlighted their success in educating the public about stormwater.

Comparing these 2018 results with a similar survey conducted by the campaign in 2013, analysis shows that reported residential practices and behavior regarding stormwater runoff continues to improve. Topics covered include lawn care, pet waste disposal, car washing, water quality, gutters, stormwater practices, willingness to pay, and taking individual action to combat stormwater runoff.

### LAWN CARE

Residential practices toward lawn care showed continued improvement toward keeping grass and leaves out of the streets and ditches which prevents storm drains and culverts from clogging.

- Only 21% of respondents in 2018 who take care of their own lawn reported using commercial fertilizer down from 29% in 2013;
- 93% of respondents in 2018 either leave their clippings on their lawn or mulch and/or compost them compared to 91% in 2013; and
- 91% of respondents in 2018 either compost, mulch and/or bag fallen leaves to 76% in 2013.

### PET WASTE DISPOSAL

Pet waste adds excessive nutrients and bacterial pollution to water, decreasing water quality and causing human health problems often leading to beach closures due to high *E. coli* levels. The handling of dog waste showed strong improvement among dog owners who responded to the survey:

- When taking their dog for a walk on the street or sidewalk, only 2% of dog owners in 2018 reported leaving dog waste on the ground down from 6% in 2013;
- When taking their dog for a walk in the winter, only 2% of dog owners in 2018 reported leaving dog waste on the ground/street down dramatically from 16% in 2013;
- When taking their dog for a walk in a park or along a trail, only 2% of dog owners in 2018 survey reported leaving dog waste on the ground also a strong drop from 25% reporting doing so in 2013.

## **WILLINGNESS TO PAY**

The survey asked respondents how much they would be willing to be charged on a monthly basis to combat problems caused by stormwater:

- 40% of respondents in 2018 were willing to be charged between \$1-\$6 compared to 33% in 2013;
- 16% of respondents in 2018 were willing to be charged between \$7-\$12 compared to 14% in 2013; and
- The number of respondents who were unwilling to be charged any dollars dropped down to only 15% compared to 30% in 2013.

## **PERSONAL ACTIONS**

- 79% of respondents in 2018 agreed with the statement that their “personal actions affect the quality of Lake Champlain’s water” compared to 72% in 2013;

The survey asked respondents which practices they would definitely adopt in the next two years to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff.

- 12% said they would install a rain barrel to catch rainwater from their roof;
- 14% said they would plant a rain garden to capture rainwater from their roof, driveway and/or walkway;
- 14% said they would plant more trees on their property.

The survey included responses from 386 individuals from a random sample of 2,400 residential households in the nine MS-4 communities and has a reliability of +/- 5 percent. For more information about the Rethink Runoff campaign and to see the full survey results, please visit:

[www.rethinkrunoff.org](http://www.rethinkrunoff.org).

## **POLLING FIRM**

The Castleton Polling Institute was established in 2012 as a research and public service institute for Castleton University. The Polling Institute has worked with government agencies, businesses, non-profits, and media organizations to conduct research and evaluations, employing the best practices in scientific survey research and focus group methodology to collect data from human subjects and generate information that either contributes to the public debate or gives clients important attitudinal information about their current and prospective customers, clients, or constituents. For more information, please visit: <http://www.castleton.edu/about-castleton/the-castleton-polling-institute>

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