

# ACTIVITY PAGES

## A Stormwater Obstacle Course

By Jeff Severin

Non-point source pollution is one of the greatest contributors to water quality impairments, and is often the focus of water celebration activities. In urban areas especially, that focus can be centered on stormwater runoff – water that runs from parking lots and streets and then “disappears” into the ground through the corner storm drain. Many people don't stop to think about where that water is going (straight to a local stream or river) before cleaning paintbrushes, dumping oil, or sweeping yard waste into the nearest drain. Nor do they realize that there are simple steps they can take to improve the quality of water that leaves their neighborhood – reducing fertilizer use, cleaning up after pets, and making sure cars aren't leaking oil or other fluids are just a few.

One activity that gets the point across by allowing participants to practice good stewardship is the Stormwater Obstacle Course. We adapted this activity from a City of Portland Environmental Services Activity found in the Ground Water Foundation's “Making A Bigger Splash”. The activity walks through 5 major obstacles to protecting stormwater quality – simple things that anyone can do to reduce non-point source pollution in their own back yard. As adapted, the activity best fits community festivals, but it could be expanded to use with school groups as well. Here's how it works:

Depending on how many participants you want to involve at once, set up obstacle course lanes, each with the following 5 obstacles (additional obstacles could be used – be creative in finding ways to address issues in your own community). Participants will race to the finish, completing each water-protecting task as they go. Laminated instructions at each station are a huge help!

**Station 1 - Litter, Litter Everywhere:** Put on plastic gloves and pick up trash that is scattered around the “watershed” so it doesn't end up washing into the local creek. Sort the trash into recycling bins. (We use rinsed aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and paper, about 4-5 pieces each.)

**Station 2 - Motor Oil Mayhem:** Pour “motor oil” from oil pan into bottle and carry to box marked “Oil Recycling” instead of dumping it down the stormdrain. (Pancake syrup looks and pours just like real motor oil, but it can get a bit sticky.)

**Station 3 - Keep it Covered:** Put on work gloves. Plant flowers or other vegetation in bare soil and cover the remaining soil with mulch. (A flowerpot or plastic container full of potting soil and a few artificial plants will do the trick for this one.)

**Station 4 – Don't Send it Down the Drain:** Put on work gloves. Rake up yard waste that could go down the stormdrain. Place waste in a compostable paper bag. (Toy rakes and fake leaves from a craft store make this station simple, but real rakes and yard waste can be used, too. Foam sheets can be cut to create stormdrains.)

**Station 5 – Clean Up After Fluffy:** Use a scoop or use a plastic bag like a glove to pick up pet waste. Place the waste in a plastic bag (or turn it inside out if used like a glove). Dump waste in a toilet. (Of course, we're talking about fake pet waste – but some people won't know the difference! If you can get a real toilet, it adds to the fun, but you can also build your own from a bucket and a plastic storage container.)

At the end of the race you can offer a prize to the first across the finish line, or to everyone who completes the course (I like to reward anyone who does the right thing!). You can also provide a handout with information about each of the stations and tips for protecting water quality – include information about where to take recyclables & used motor oil in your own community, or where to buy compostable yard waste bags. This drives home the point that you can make a difference just by making a few wise decisions. Before long, those stormwater obstacles will be overcome with ease.

For additional information about how to set up this activity or to receive a copy of the station instructions or obstacle course handouts, contact Jeff Severin at [jsev@kualumni.org](mailto:jsev@kualumni.org) or Kansas StreamLink at 785-840-0700

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## START

1. Put on plastic gloves and pick up scattered litter. Sort into recycle bins: Plastics, Aluminum, and Paper.



2. Oil (pancake syrup) will be in an oil pan at this obstacle. Pour oil into container and carry to box marked "Oil Collection".



3. Put on work gloves. Plant vegetation (artificial plants), in flower pot and cover bare soil with mulch.



4. Put on work gloves. Rake up lawn waste near storm drain (Styrofoam cutout) and place in compostable bag.



5. Scoop up fake pet waste, place it in plastic bag. Carry bag to toilet to "dispose" of waste.



## FINISH

*Do you have an activity that you would like to share in the next edition of Idea Pool?  
If so, please pass it along to Melissa at [melisarth7@aol.com](mailto:melisarth7@aol.com).*