

The Puget Sound Starts Here (PSSH) campaign on Whidbey Island seeks to increase awareness of the magnitude of Puget Sound's pollution problem, and to motivate residents to adopt new behaviors that will decrease Whidbey's contribution to the pollution entering the Sound through stormwater runoff and other sources of pollution. Whidbey Island has the opportunity to play a special role in this due to its vital nearshore habitat that serves forage fish and salmon, nourished by some of the region's most productive river systems.

Who we are:

In 2009, a small group of Beach Watchers got together with the hope of making an impact on stormwater pollution by putting their weight behind the Puget Sound Starts Here public education campaign. To that end, the group – calling themselves PSSH-Whidbey – researched local and regional water quality information and began to present that information to small groups around the community. Thus far members of PSSH-W have given presentations at local service clubs, churches, Sound Waters, homeowners' associations and other venues, in addition to staffing an informational display at events and farmers' markets.

What information we present:

The topic of our talks is water quality in Puget Sound, with an emphasis on simple actions everyone can take to mitigate stormwater pollution. We cover the basics of how pollution on the ground makes its way into waterways and Puget Sound, and focus in on two solutions to the resulting stormwater pollution. These two solutions are: changing the landscape so more water soaks in, to be filtered and cleaned by soil microbes (we briefly discuss projects such as rain gardens, and have printed informational material available as well); and reducing the amount of pollution that makes it onto the ground in the first place. For reducing pollution, we highlight strategies everyone can use in how they care for their house, their car, their yard, and their pets. The intent of the presentations is to educate people regarding the basic processes involved in stormwater pollution and to provide simple actions that everyone can take. This is based on the research that shows that people who take one step to positively impact the environment are much more likely to take a second, step, as well.

Where we are headed:

PSSH-W would like to continue their presentations to the community, focusing on groups that are outside the usual loop of water quality education, such as homeowners' associations, Real Estate groups and churches. Other groups PSSH-W would like to reach out to are high school and middle school students, through collaboration with local teachers. The traveling display materials are kept updated and are available for events. PSSH-W continues to be available to do stormwater education presentations to groups of nearly any age or size, of a length to suit nearly any slot. For more information, contact Tillie Scruton at 331-2957 or emailtillie@yahoo.com

Some suggested strategies for cleaning up stormwater runoff on Whidbey:

At your house:

- take care of your septic system: inspect it regularly, and keep food, bleach, and large quantities of cleaners out of it. Avoid putting too much water down the drains at a time, which can overload your system (expensive!).
- choose your household cleaners with care. Try using baking soda and vinegar for common tasks, and use the right cleaner for the job.
- keep stuff off your roof, to discourage moss. If you treat for moss, know that what you put on

the roof goes into Puget Sound if your gutters feed into the storm drains.

- sweep your carport instead of pressure washing it

Around the yard:

- consider reducing your grass lawn and replacing it with plantings that require less chemical treatment and mowing
- if you do maintain grass, cut high to save water and shade out moss, aerate, and fertilize with a slow-release fertilizer
- choose the right plant for the right place. Plants that are well matched to your soil and light have a good chance to flourish without the use of chemicals
- consider going organic in the yard
- consider planting native plants, which are well adapted to the region and often do a good job soaking up excess water, reducing runoff.
- take a Master Gardeners class to increase your local knowledge about plants, soil, gardening and much more

With your car:

- drive less
- fix engine leaks
- if your car does leak, park over cardboard until you can get it fixed
- when you wash your car, take it to a car wash instead of washing it at home. If you do wash it at home, wash it over grass instead of on the curb, so some of the waste water will soak in instead of washing downstream into Puget Sound.
- when you have your brake pads replaced, consider replacing them with brake pads that contain little or no copper

With your pet:

- scoop the poop while on walks, and every day in the yard. Waste should be bagged and sent to the landfill (do not flush it down the toilet or attempt to compost it for use in the yard).