For Immediate Release

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Public-Private Partnership Spurs Research and Action

If this pipe led back to a factory, officials say, it would be shut down for polluting the water.

But it doesn't drain a factory. This pipe collects the run-off from the residential area of Westmoreland.

There's a lot of nasty stuff going down the drain in Dane County communities, but research combined with citizen action in a Madison neighborhood shows what can be done about it.

Studies of a storm drain emptying into Lake Wingra have detected zinc, lead, copper, fecal coliform, pesticides and the by-products of combustion, frequently at levels exceeding state standards for surface water and groundwater quality.

A cooperative effort between a young man working to become an Eagle Scout and Dane County will help researchers explore the connection between what goes on the lawns and what goes down the storm drain.

Brian Wiesner and a group of other Boy Scouts will contact homeowners in the Westmoreland area for information on their lawn care practices and, on May 18 - 19, they will collect soil samples from those willing to participate in a study.

Dane County Extension will analyze the samples and Extension Agent Mindy Habecker will provide homeowners with suggested lawn care practices based on the nature of the soil. An ecological, step-by-step approach to pest management will be provided by UW- Extension lawn expert, Roseanne Kachadurian.

According to analyses prepared by DNR Environmental Specialist Roger Bannerman, PCBs and pesticides such as DDT, Chlordane, Atrazine, Alachlor and Cyanazine are present in run-off in amounts exceeding water quality standards.

Stormwater run-off from the neighborhood almost always had levels of fecal coliform that would shut down beaches. The most likely source for this bacteria is pet waste.

Studies also show that levels of zinc and copper would exceed acute toxicity criteria for warm water sportfish 89% and 78% of the time, respectively. Lead, chromium and cadmium have been discovered in levels that could be hazardous to groundwater. Levels of zinc, copper and lead seem to be related to the level of automobile traffic.

Bannerman said this research is part of a series of studies designed to determine which pollutants pose problems for Wisconsin's water resources, where these pollutants come from and what can be done to control them.

Knowledge of the pollutants flowing into area lakes and streams and the sources of these pollutants will help officials and citizens alike take action to fight water pollution, Bannerman said.

Residents living in the area drained by the storm sewer are actively involved in research and clean-up efforts. Members of the Westmoreland Neighborhood Association have distributed tips for homeowners on how to protect water quality, stenciled warnings on neighborhood storm drains and taken part in a demonstration of water-friendly lawn care practices.

Researchers and Westmoreland area residents clearly have their work cut out for them as they strive to protect and preserve water resources, but both parties seem prepared for long-term cooperation, which may develop into a model for public-private partnerships.