



# Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners

Annual Summary of Results  
July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

This summary was produced by the Northern Virginia Regional  
Commission on behalf of the 2025 Clean Water Partners.



## Stormwater Pollution in Northern Virginia

Water bodies in Northern Virginia, including the region's numerous streams, lakes, and rivers, provide a range of environmental, social, and economic benefits to surrounding communities. However, when waterways are polluted and water quality becomes impaired, their key resources are reduced and result in negative impacts to both humans and the natural environment.

Polluted stormwater runoff is the number one cause of poor water quality in Northern Virginia's waterways. When it rains and snows, water runs off streets, driveways, yards and parking lots and mixes with pollutants, such as litter, fertilizer, pet waste, road salt, and auto fluids. These pollutants then flow into storm drains on the street and are discharged directly into nearby streams.

To reduce the impacts of pollution, the Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners joined together in 2003 to improve residents' stormwater-related knowledge and behaviors through an ongoing public education campaign for the region.

### About the Partnership

The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners (NVCWP) is composed of a group of over 20 local governments, public schools, drinking water and sanitation authorities, and businesses that share the common goals to keep Northern Virginia residents healthy and safe by reducing the amount of pollution from stormwater runoff that reaches local creeks and rivers, and empower individuals to take action to reduce pollution.

To meet these goals, the partners work together to:

- Identify high priority water quality issues for the region
- Identify the target audience(s) for outreach
- Educate the region's residents on simple ways to reduce pollution around their homes
- Monitor changes in behavior through surveys and other data collection techniques
- Pilot new cost-effective opportunities for public outreach and education

Membership is voluntary and each member makes an annual contribution to fund the program. By working together, the partners are able to leverage their funds to develop and implement a range of bilingual education and outreach strategies throughout Northern Virginia.

The 2025 campaign helped to satisfy MS4 (Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) Phase I and Phase II permit requirements for stormwater education and documenting changes in behavior.



[Learn more at Onlyrain.org](https://www.Onlyrain.org)

# 2025 Campaign Overview

The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners identified the following water quality issues to highlight in their 2025 campaign:





- **Nutrients (Phosphorus and Nitrogen)**
- **Bacteria**
- **Salt**
- **Illicit Discharges (e.g., pesticides, motor oil, etc.)**

Target audiences for these issues include, but are not limited to, pet owners, winter salt applicators, home mechanics, and residents with a lawn or garden. To reach these audiences, the 2025 campaign used a combination of social media, television and other paid advertising, printed materials, and the Only Rain website to distribute messaging that could improve knowledge and behaviors around stormwater pollution. The partners also tabled at local events and led other in-person activities throughout the year to engage residents and raise campaign awareness.

The 2025 campaign also continued to update outreach and engagement programming through a number of new social marketing tools, including an updated quarterly e-newsletter, new forms of paid advertising, such as reddit and programmatic ads, as well as new infographics and website content.

## Social Media Highlights

In 2025, the NVCWP continued to expand its social media presence and content with consistent growth on Instagram and Facebook platforms. Twitter/X and Threads showed reduced traction compared to previous years, which can be attributed to changes in platform use and available features.

Key Metrics	Facebook	Threads	X	Instagram
				
New Followers	109	3	3	103
Total Followers	721	69	196	312
Total Posts	264	223	221	263
Total Post Clicks	21,665	-	-	16,553
Total Post Engagements	2,194	170	97	602

# Video Advertisements

The 2025 campaign engaged residents through two video advertisements focusing on residential stormwater management actions. The campaign aired the videos in English and Spanish on a combination of mobile, desktop, and standard TV platforms for a total of 12,798 ads aired and 1,281,822 impressions, or views.

## 2025 Campaign Metrics



Social Media Impressions\*

3,101,179



Non-Social Media Impressions\*\*

884,546



Post Clicks

38,218



Premium Digital TV Impressions\*

1,281,822



E-Newsletter Subscribers

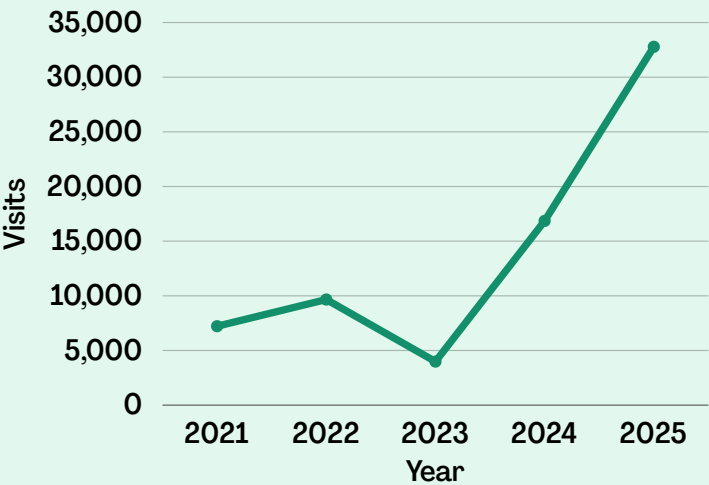
2,689



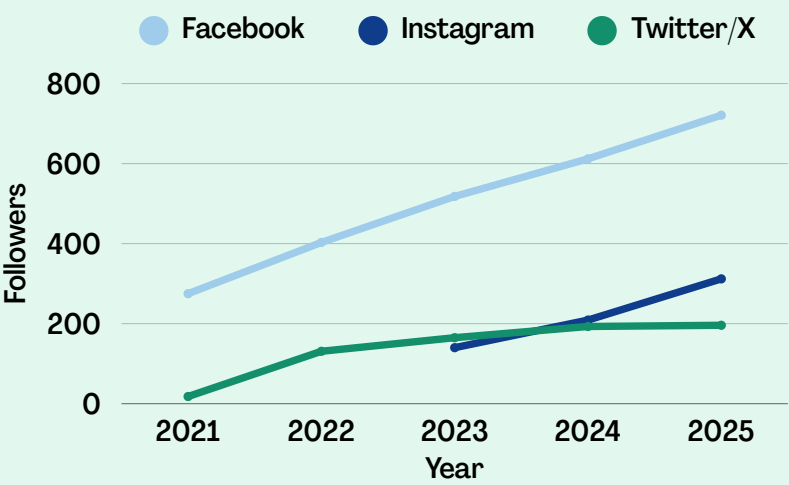
Website Visits

32,783

Website Visits



Social Media Followers



\*Impressions are the number of times an ad appeared on a TV, computer, or other electronic device.

\*\*Non-social media impressions include impressions on Google Search, Reddit, and other websites outside of Twitter/X and Meta platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Threads).

# Annual Stormwater Survey

The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners conduct an annual online survey of approximately 500 residents in the region to better understand their stormwater-related knowledge and behaviors over time. Survey results help the partners to assess their campaign's effectiveness and improve future education and outreach efforts.

## Survey Findings

### Stormwater and Watershed Knowledge

Similar to past years, 68% of Northern Virginia residents reported that they are familiar with the term "watershed". When asked which watershed they live in, 40% of residents selected that they live within the Potomac River watershed, while 24% selected that they live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

When asked where stormwater eventually ends up, 39% of residents responded that it only goes to the Potomac River or Chesapeake Bay, and 19% selected that it only goes to a wastewater treatment plant. In a slight decrease from 2024 (41%), 34% of residents reported that it ends up at both destinations.

### Information and Advertising

29% of residents reported that they have seen or received at least some form of information about reducing water pollution in the past 12 months. Of those who were aware of an event for water quality improvement, such as stream clean ups and storm drain stenciling, 68% reported participating in the event. Participation in water quality activities has grown steadily in recent years, with responses in 2025 showing a significant rise compared to 2024 (54%) and an even greater increase from 2018 (26%).

37% of survey respondents selected that they were familiar with the NVCWP prior to the survey. When shown the "only rain down the storm drain" fish logo, 55% of residents reported having previously seen the logo. Both responses remain similar to 2023 and 2024 results.

In the next campaign year, social media and website content will focus more heavily on "only rain down the drain" branding, including a greater emphasis on the fish logo, #onlyrain hashtags, and other tools to more consistently promote awareness of the campaign and improve its recognition.





## Campaign Impact

Residents who have viewed at least one NVCWP video ad were asked a series of questions about the impact of the ads, including ways that their attitudes and behaviors towards different forms of pollution have changed since then. Similar to previous years, over 85% of respondents reported that they now have a greater understanding of pet waste, fertilizer, and motor oil impacts on local water quality. Moreover, 76% stated that they now pick up more pet waste, 65% fertilize less frequently, and 79% now dispose of motor oil properly, while over 80% of respondents noted that they were already taking at least one of the actions to reduce pollution. With informative messaging around stormwater pollution and ways to reduce its impacts, the NVCWP will continue to utilize its video ads as a key form of engagement to reach audiences that do not use social media or other primary web platforms.

## Resident Behaviors

The survey asked specific questions to understand changes in Northern Virginia residents' behaviors around relevant stormwater management and pollution issues, including pet waste, lawn and garden care, winter salt, car fluids, and household hazardous waste.

### Dog Waste

About half (48%) of residents reported owning at least one dog. Of those that walk their dog, 89% stated that they always or usually pick up their dog's waste during walks. The majority also reported picking up after their pet in their own yard on a daily basis (61%), while 28% pick up on a weekly basis. Responses to these questions have not changed significantly from 2023 and 2024.

When asked why they pick up their dog's waste, respondents most frequently selected that they do so because pet waste causes water pollution (27%), followed by the selection that "it is gross" (21%). Only 12% of residents noted picking up their pet's waste due to a city or county ordinance, highlighting a continued decline in this selection over the past five years.



### Pollution Reporting

When asked about reporting potential water pollution, 53% of residents stated that they know who to contact. The majority (69%) also selected that they would probably or definitely contact someone to report a potential source of water pollution, representing a gradual increase in this response since 2018 (42%).

Of those who were equally likely to call and not to call to report potential pollution, as well as those that would not call, over a quarter (29%) selected their reason being that they would prefer not to communicate with officials or authorities. In addition, 22% selected that it is "none of my business", while 17% selected that they are "too busy".

### Hazardous Waste Drop-Offs

Consistent with the past several years, 61% of residents reported knowing if their locality has a specific drop-off location for household hazardous waste (HHW). While the majority of residents continue to know of drop-off sites, future education will focus on sharing the locations of HHW drop-off facilities, materials that are acceptable to bring, and other resources to highlight and clarify the drop-off process for the public.



### Stormwater Management Features

Survey respondents were provided descriptions of a rain barrel, rain garden, and conservation landscaping and asked whether they have heard of these stormwater management features and would be interested in installing one on their property. As in prior years, residents were most familiar with rain barrels (73%) and noted the highest interest in obtaining one (35%).

Despite the highest familiarity with rain barrels, residents were more likely to already have conservation landscaping on their property than the other two stormwater management features. Similar to 2024, residents were least familiar with rain gardens, yet 31% selected that they were interested in having one in their yard.

### Winter Salt

Respondents were asked questions to measure attitudes and behaviors related to snow and ice maintenance, including the use of deicers (e.g., road salt) and abrasives (e.g., sand). Rising from 2024 results, 42% of residents stated that they always or frequently apply deicers at their residence during snowy and icy conditions, and 25% always or frequently apply an abrasive. Of those that use a deicer, there were also slight increases from 2024 in those that apply before (34%) or during (27%) storm events, while fewer selected that they apply after (26%).

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions, positive and negative, of the impacts from road salt application. Similar to 2024, the majority of residents selected that salt has a positive impact on emergency vehicle safety (64%), motorist safety (66%), and pedestrian safety (69%), but only 40% noted that it has a negative impact on local waterways or on tap water (35%).

Winter salt related education and outreach will continue to emphasize its impacts on the environment and drinking water sources while sharing correct behaviors for effective salt management, including when to apply and how to sweep up excess salt.



## Vehicle Maintenance

Of those that own or lease a car, 65% of residents reported taking their vehicle to a commercial car wash, while 37% wash their vehicle at home, representing nearly identical percentages as 2024. For those that wash their cars or trucks at home, residents also continue to most frequently clean their vehicle three to four times a year (25%), while 4% wash less than once a year and 20% wash more than 12 times a year. While frequency of washing has remained consistent, there was a rise in residents that use environmentally-friendly methods to clean their vehicle, including use of an environmentally-friendly detergent (62%), washing on pervious surfaces, including grass, gravel, and/or dirt (52%), or just using water (23%).

Motor oil related behaviors also largely remained the same as 2024 in which 64% of residents reported going to an auto center for an oil change, and 21% take their old motor oil to a gas station or hazmat facility for recycling. 14% of respondents noted that they store their used motor oil in their garage, place it in the trash, or dump it down the storm drain, sink or onto the ground.

## Lawn and Garden Care

82% of residents with a lawn or garden stated that they use a lawn care service at least once a year, representing a significant increase from 2024 (66%). The majority of residents with a lawn or garden also reported using fertilizer at least once a year. Residents continue to most frequently fertilize twice a year (32%), while 18% never fertilize their lawn or garden.

When asked how they dispose of their grass clippings, nearly half (49%) of residents either bag their grass clippings for composting/recycling or put clippings in a compost bin. 19% bag and place clippings in the trash, and 32% leave it on the lawn or garden. However, if grass clippings ended up in the street, 60% of residents reported sweeping or blowing them back into their lawn, while 22% leave them in the street and 18% sweep them into the storm drain.



## 2025 Campaign Goals

The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners look forward to enhancing the annual campaign in 2025 through an updated social marketing strategy, including new social media and e-newsletter graphics and content, a revamped Clean Water Pledge, community outreach materials, and improvements to its social media platforms.

Notably, the campaign will phase out the use of Twitter/X due to reduced use and engagement from the campaign's target audiences while introducing LinkedIn to better reach Northern Virginia communities, including its residents, businesses, and other professional users of the platform.

## 2025 Summary of Results



# 2025 Stormwater Survey at a Glance



The Northern Virginia Clean Water Partners (NVCWP) conduct an annual survey to better understand Northern Virginia residents' stormwater knowledge and behaviors and help inform future education and outreach efforts.



## Watershed Knowledge



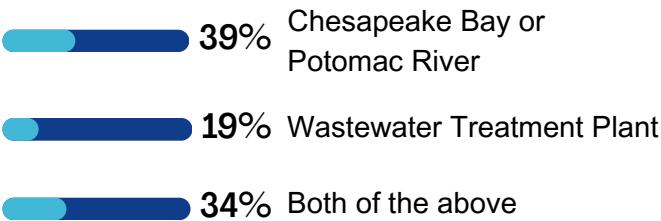
About 1/4 (**24%**) of residents believe they live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

**68%** of residents were familiar with the term "watershed" prior to the survey.



## Stormwater Runoff

When asked where stormwater ends up, residents responded that it goes to...



## Pollution Reporting

**69%** of residents would probably or definitely report potential pollution to their town or county.



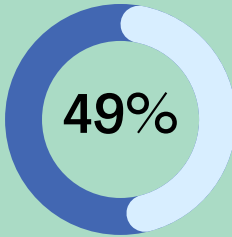
**53%** of residents definitely or think they know who to call to report stormwater pollution.



## Lawn & Garden Care

**75%**

of residents fertilize their lawn or garden at least once a year. **25%** either never fertilize or only fertilize when a soil test recommends it.



Nearly half (**49%**) bag their grass clippings for composting/recycling or put clippings in a compost bin.



## Ad Reach

**55%**

of residents recognize the "Only Rain" logo, while **37%** are familiar with the NVCWP.



## Winter Salt Application

**42%** of residents always or frequently apply deicer (e.g., salt) at their residence during snowy or icy conditions.



About 1/3 apply deicers before winter storms, while **53%** apply during or after storms.

## Additional Information

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**Website:** [www.onlyrain.org](http://www.onlyrain.org)

### Social Media:

- **Facebook:** [facebook.com/NVCWP](https://facebook.com/NVCWP)
- **LinkedIn:** [linkedin.com/company/only-rain/](https://linkedin.com/company/only-rain/)
- **Instagram:** [instagram.com/novacwp](https://instagram.com/novacwp)
- **Threads:** [threads.net/@novacwp](https://threads.net/@novacwp)

### 2025 Clean Water Partners:

Fairfax County | Arlington County | Loudoun County | Loudoun Water | Fairfax Water | City of Alexandria | City of Fairfax | City of Falls Church | City of Manassas | City of Manassas Park | Stafford County | Town of Leesburg | Town of Dumfries | Town of Herndon | Town of Vienna | Prince William County | Prince William Water | Northern Virginia Regional Commission | George Mason University | Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program | Fairfax County Public Schools | Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District | Prince William County Public Schools

