



## RETHINK RUNOFF

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Survey shows improved actions by public to combat stormwater runoff; 20-year effort in regional collaboration paying dividends

*Winooski, VT* – [Rethink Runoff](#), a regional stormwater outreach and education program, has published the [results](#) of their most recent survey in nine cities and towns of Chittenden County about residents' perceptions and habits regarding stormwater runoff. The program has conducted a similar survey every five years for the past 20 years, in an effort to gauge the effectiveness of their program in educating residents and influencing behavior about the impacts of excess stormwater runoff and what practices can mitigate its effects.

### About the Survey

The survey was conducted from January 12 to January 30, 2023, by Probolsky Research, a market and opinion research firm with locations in California and Washington D.C. that conducts research in business, government, non-profit, election, and association practice areas. The survey included 500 participants from Burlington, South Burlington, Colchester, Essex Junction, Williston, Milton, Essex, Shelburne, and Winooski. The survey yielded a +/-4.5% margin of error at a 95% level of confidence. 20% of respondents replied by phone while 80% replied online.

### Personal Actions

Survey results indicate a sustained public understanding of the role of residents in dealing with stormwater runoff. 79% of those surveyed agree that their own personal actions affect the water quality in Lake Champlain. This was very similar to results of 79%, 72% and 79% reported in the 2018, 2013 and 2008 surveys, respectively. While a near majority of those surveyed definitely felt that roads, parking lots and farms have a great impact on water quality, at the same time, 20% of those surveyed also felt that runoff from residential roofs and driveways had a great impact on water quality as well.

Rethink Runoff encourages area residents to adopt various practices to slow and infiltrate stormwater. Of those surveyed who make decisions about their property, over the next two years:

- 12% said they definitely plan to install a rain barrel,
- 11% said they definitely plan install a rain garden,
- 15% said they definitely plan to ask their landscaper to use natural lawn care practices, and
- 14% said they definitely plan to plant trees on their property

### Pet Waste and Water Quality

One continued focus of Rethink Runoff is the proper disposal of pet waste. Pet waste that is left on the ground is often washed into our streams and rivers, where it is carried to Lake Champlain, leading to high levels of *e.Coli* and beach closings during the warmer summer months. Fortunately, area residents

have taken the message distributed by Rethink Runoff and others to heart as the 2023 survey results demonstrate. In both 2023 and in 2018 only 2% of dog owners surveyed indicated that they left the waste on the ground when walking the dog. This sustained reported behavior represents a definite improvement over reported behavior in 2013 when, for example, 25% and 16% of respondents indicated they left the waste on the ground when walking the dog in a park or trail or walking the dog in winter respectively.

### **Lawn Care and Fertilizer Use**

Reported behavior regarding lawn care was mixed. Unfortunately, we saw an uptick in individuals who use fertilizer on their lawns from 21% in 2018 to 34%. On the other hand, residents are getting the message that it is better to fertilize your lawn in the fall so its nutrients have a longer time to work as well as less likely to wash off. In 2018, 93% of those surveyed who fertilize would spread some fertilizer in the spring but in 2023 that had dropped to 28%. Finally, the 2023 survey results show excellent reported progress by residents in handling grass clippings and leaves to prevent them getting into ditches and storm drains. 94% of respondents in 2023, compared to only 47% in 2018, said that they either compost, leave grass and leaves on the ground or bag them for disposal rather than disposing of them in the nearest ditch or ravine.

### **About Rethink Runoff**

Rethink Runoff is a regional stormwater outreach, education and participation campaign formed by nine municipalities (Milton, Colchester, Winooski, Burlington, Essex Junction, Essex, Williston, South Burlington and Shelburne) and three organizations (BTV International Airport, the Vermont Agency of Transportation, and UVM) in Chittenden County, subject to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS-4) permit requirements who pooled their resources to develop and implement annual social marketing campaigns and events to encourage best practices that combat the effects of stormwater runoff.

To obtain a copy of the survey results and to learn more about Rethink Runoff, please visit <https://rethinkrunoff.org/2023-survey>.

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