

BUILDING COMMUNITY

WASTE *Water* education

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WasteWater Education brings two peripheral issues to the forefront of our minds and makes a compelling case as to why they deserve to be there. So what are the two issues, you might ask? As you might have guessed by its name, the organization highlights the interrelationship between land and water, specifically ‘waste’ water, but carries it one step further to explain the relationship between our treatment (or mistreatment) of this resource and the societal and biological impact that has on our communities.

The organization operates with intent to “increase awareness that water quality is directly linked to the use of appropriate wastewater systems and their management,” and they do so by showcasing real life examples of successful, affordable options from throughout the world. Not an easy task when recent studies show the average American has barely a 6th Grade level grasp of basic science!

WasteWater Education accomplishes this by “providing access to education, which increases public awareness of the link between clean drinking water, safe recreational waters, environmentally sustainable surface and groundwater with watershed based best management practices related to appropriate wastewater systems, technology, treatment and management.”

Municipalities face a major challenge - overloaded, underfunded sewer systems that are now also responsible for cleaning, pharmaceutical, and personal care products that are flushed down the drain. Contrary to their original purpose of simply disposing of human waste, this is becoming increasingly problematic as expenses related to installing and operating these systems increase. Smaller scale, advanced technology, decentralized options are often more affordable - if people know about them.

Perhaps WasteWater Education’s Executive Director Dendra J. Best captured it best when she said, “Part of the education purpose of WasteWater Education is to sift myth from fact, common sense from paranoia - to connect all the messages of how people use water, how water goes through our wastewater treatment systems, how the environment recycles that water and how to make wise and affordable choices for keeping that water cycle viable and sustainable. All wastewater systems cost money both to install and operate. If the design ends up being unaffordable to maintain, what was the point?”

The nation’s underground water and wastewater systems, thousands of miles of concrete pipes, include an unknown number which are severely dated and failing. Flooding, sink holes, loss of water supply, and deterioration of the waterways are obvious consequences. What’s more, the runoff water from roads, driveways, and rooftops that flows into our rivers and streams has significant implications for aquatic life in these waterways. Coupled with the fact that most municipal wastewater treatment plants discharge to those same waterways, rethinking sanitation systems is a major issue worldwide.