



# SUMMARY

## The Alice Ferguson Foundation's Potomac Watershed Trash Summit

March 16, 2006

At: The World Bank • Washington, DC

---

### Summary of Next Steps for the Region (Group Action Planning Wrap-Up Session/Reports from Panel Sessions)

- ▶ **Wake Up and Smell the Trash! Public Information and Education**
  1. Develop repeat messages to raise awareness and encourage stewardship.
  2. Make an assessment of current communication efforts first, then work on consolidating messages and resources.
  3. Develop a web-based platform on the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative website to post all resource materials for free.
  4. Increase peer pressure by citizens. Use “viral” marketing and leverage different audiences.
  5. *Make it fun!* Use a task and reward system (e.g. cleanup volunteers get to participate in a cool concert where only volunteers can get in).

---

### Detailed Panel Session Notes

#### Wake Up and Smell the Trash! Public Information and Education

**Synopsis:** Discuss innovative marketing ideas for reaching audiences through non-traditional means and discuss strategies for the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative's regional public information campaign.

**Facilitator:** *Ben Vitale, Senior Director Ecosystems Market and Finance, Conservation International*

**Panel Members:**

- Philippe Cousteau, CEO/President and Founder, EarthEcho International
- b j Altschul, Professor of Public Relations, American University
- McArthur, Vice President of Operations, Free Range Graphics
- Aileen Winqvist, Environmental Planner, Arlington County Government
- Deb Oliver, Public Information Officer, Prince William County
- Merrit Drucker, Clean City Coordinator for Washington, DC

- ▶ **Presentation by Philippe Cousteau**

We need to combat misinformation. According to the National Environmental Training Association, 45 million Americans think that the ocean is a source of fresh water, and many more believe that diapers are the leading cause of trash in landfills (while they really are only 10%). We need to raise people's awareness and get people to act on this knowledge. However, this requires a profound, sustained effort to change behavior. Education is a prerequisite and needs to be lifewide and lifelong. Education needs to permeate every facet of a person's life and experiential storytelling with inspiring stories is what will hold their attention. We need to explore informal learning options and all media platforms (radio, TV, theater, videocasting to cell phones, inflight entertainment, etc.). The social interaction aspect of learning is an important tool. Free-choice learning has become increasingly important, as is lifelong learning (at home, at work, on the weekends, etc.) People need to know that they can make a difference, but if this isn't incentive enough to change, then they need to know that everything they do makes a difference---both positive and negative, and that making (or not making) a choice will have consequences.

► **Presentation by b j Altschul**

Effective communication has to be a two-way effort regardless of the media---we need to know who we are really trying to reach. We need to reach people who are not like us. We need to do research and do participant observation to determine who these people are. Successful campaigns take us from awareness to motivation to action; ask for specific, focused behavior; employ a sense of personal involvement or connection; and need planned or "trigger" events to cause heightened awareness. Characteristics of failed campaigns are unrealistic expectations; inappropriate messages; and expectations/achievements that aren't related. The public needs to care and seek information---they need to recognize the problem and get personally involved. An interactive environment fosters an exchange of information. An example of a program that worked was the singing garbage men from Tacoma, Washington. The program emphasized fun and pride, was a novel idea, and attracted the media.

► **Presentation by McArthur**

From the perspective of a communications/design firm, we need to use new avenues of communication to reach people who aren't part of the environmentalist core. A short animated film, *The Meatrix*, (a reaction against factory farming) was shown as an example of an unusual method of changing people's behavior. *The Meatrix* was seen by 10 million people since it was created. The film was available on a website and had links to specific actions that could be taken to protest (or not support) factory farming. If you hand people a new paradigm, they will work with it.

► **Presentation by Aileen Winquist**

Several Northern Virginia jurisdictions have pooled their pollution prevention efforts for a bigger effect and a more consistent message. Citizens get most of their information from mass media. This particular campaign targeted pollution from grass overfertilization, dog waste, and cars. One of the challenges faced is that people don't understand that what goes down the storm drains goes directly to streams. Messages need to be short and simple. The Northern Virginia jurisdictions looked at some EPA focus group information as a model. They identified a few key behaviors/problems and provided solutions within the campaign. The Washington DC area has the longest one-

way average commute time, and as a result, has many radio listeners. Thus, the Northern Virginia jurisdictions chose to develop a radio spot. They used the EPA Outreach Toolkit as a basis for the campaign and modified it to meet the specific needs of this region. A total of 895 radio spots aired in two four-week flights, and the cost of the campaign was \$125,030.

► **Presentation by Deb Oliver**

We need to try to convince people to change their habits. Residents work hard and are gone from home a lot. People need convenience---a new behavior can't be too hard or too expensive, and shouldn't be out of their comfort zone. Messages need to be diversified and taken to the audiences, using many media and any unique opportunities that may be available: web, TV, radio, movie theater ads before movies, targeted newspapers for specific communities (such as Latino), and government channel TV. Messages can be clever and use humor, but need to be straightforward and tell people what is expected of them. To find appropriate venues for spreading the message, we need to find out what our audience is interested in. We can go to neighborhood/school/sporting events and other community activities. One example of targeting a market was by combining a local garden show with Earth Day events. By merging the two events, the attendance was increased. By forming partnerships with other organizations with similar goals, partners can do joint projects and support each others' efforts. Partners don't need to ask too much of each other, but can help each other some. Youth should be targeted with messages---youth have time to care about the environment and are passionate. Teen leaders like getting involved in community service projects. Give youth something to do and empower them.

► **Presentation by Merrit Drucker**

There is an enormous need for environmental education in the US. Our professionals and PhDs need to start having a coherent message reflecting sound science that effectively communicates complex problems and solutions. Communities are hungry for environmental information. DC started creating Tip Sheets on many subjects to be distributed all over. The District wrote them, did the artwork, and printed them internally. They have been translated into Spanish. It takes about six repeat distributions before behavioral changes start happening. The District ran a focus group a month ago--young people were looking for leadership and needed adult role models. Big industry is an audience for our message and is a big polluter. A heavy emphasis is needed on infrastructure upgrades and repairs. We need central funding from the federal government for a very strong communication campaign, because efforts are not cheap. Partners can help each other by pooling their efforts.

► **Question and Answer Session**

Ben – We have lots of ways to reach youth that didn't exist before.

Tawna – As a scientist trying to communicate with new target audiences, it is becoming important to partner with people that we never thought of before and take our message to where people are going, such as NASCAR events and rock concerts/musicians. We can use the events and the celebrities to get our message out. “Know your enemy and make friends with him.”

Russ – We need to keep the message simple and frame the message to bridge the information gap. We need to give our public something simple, that makes sense, and that they can adopt immediately.

Joanna – People want to be involved in efforts but don't know how to find the events/organizations to get involved with. We need to show that we have consolidated partnerships and communicate to people where to go, like on one web site.

Angela – We can engage youth through the school systems, such as through the new requirement to reduce the amount of junk food eaten (and thus excess packaging thrown away) but we should use the PTAs to involve kids.

Merrit – We need to support the teachers with materials. Many children in schools don't have iPODS or even books, so we still need to get printed materials and lesson plans into the schools in large quantities. We need to provide funding to schools and Spanish translation of materials is also critical.

Monica – We need to reach kids through their parents, who need to teach their kids a conservation ethic.

John – Who do we consider the target audience to be? Children may not be the right target. Who really is the litterbug?

Merritt – The wind blown litter from the waste hauling industry is a major culprit. Federal laws are weak and are not enforced. Adults and for-profit industries are our biggest litterbugs, not kids. There is more waste blowing off one truck than 10 schools can produce!

Deb – Children can bring the message home, and impact the adults. Kids are more likely to change their habits than adults, and kids like telling their parents what to do. That's why they need to be targeted, not because they are the worst litterbugs.

- *What is our first step? What must we work on together to be successful?*

Tom – 54% of single families recycle, but only 17% of businesses recycle. We should be sharing legislative/regulatory efforts among jurisdictions and also buy some advertising together. We could produce a regional advertisement, like COG's commuter connections.

Alison – Maybe we can develop a web-based platform on the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative website for posting educational materials, where we can freely distribute the current materials that are available and pool our resources.

Crystal – We should share success stories and measure our communication results. Since we still need to sell our efforts to higher levels of government, our outreach programs need to have measurable results, to add value to our efforts and sell the outreach efforts.

Rod – We need to develop messages that will raise awareness and encourage stewardship – this will allow us to repeat the message in a number of settings and communicate it around

our entire network of regions, agencies, and people. The simple, consistent messages being used in the Chesapeake can serve as a model for the Potomac Watershed. The more a message is repeated, the easier it is to follow through with action.

Curtis – “Carpet bomb the public”! Enforcement is not success. Success is when the public is doing its own ‘neighborhood enforcement’, through increased citizen peer pressure. The public needs to change its mindset about litter.

Debbie – We need to make an assessment of current communication efforts first, to get an idea of what’s already out there.

Sallie - We should make this fun – by having a task and a reward (i.e. \$1 for each 100 lbs. of newspaper collected). By introducing an element of fun and competition, people are more likely to participate.

Ron – If trash cans are full, then littering isn’t the big issue. We need to know how much of the trash problem is overflow.

Merrit – Putting together a radio or TV ad could give us something to pool our resources toward.

Philippe – We could make a film, but for a little bit more money, we could also build web ad snippets, and videocasts for phones into the campaign. If we intend to address multimedia options at the outset of the campaign, it is easier to get more for the money. We need to go into it with the expectation that we want to hit multiple types of media, instead of trying to retrofit the campaign to new media at a later date. We should make it fun.

► **Key Action Items**

- Develop messages to raise awareness and encourage stewardship – this will allow us to repeat the message in different venues and media.
- Make an assessment of current communication efforts. The public doesn’t know where to go for information, so we need to consolidate our information platform.
- Develop a web-based platform on the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative website and post all resource materials.
- Increase peer pressure by citizens for a “viral” marketing effect. Leverage all avenues, including point of purchase, etc.
- Make this fun – with a task and a reward! We need a “big carrot”, or incentive.

► **Lower Priority Action Items**

- Partner with NASCAR, rock concerts, and other means of using events and celebrities to share our message.
- Do research on ‘hands-on, experiential workshops to change behavior’.
- Engage youth through school systems, including using PTAs to involve kids.
- Support teachers with materials.
- Provide funding to schools and translate materials into other languages such as Spanish.

- Analyze the different sources of trash, and attack the biggest sources (adults and for-profit industries such as the waste hauling industry).