Southwest Florida Water Management District

Crystal River/Kings Bay & Rainbow River

Septic System, Fertilizer and Pesticide Use Watershed Education Program

Focus Group Report

kerr&downs RESEARCH

Project Director: Phillip E. Downs, Ph.D.
2992 Habersham Drive
Tallahassee, Florida 32309
(850) 906-3111 fax (850) 906-3112
www.kerr-downs.com

Contents

Introduction

Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) has conducted previous communication campaigns in the Crystal River/Kings Bay & Rainbow River Watershed designed to sensitize residents to the relationship between fertilizer use, septic tank maintenance, and pollution of water bodies. The present study was designed to test messages that will resonate with residents as the District prepares to develop a new communication campaign.

The following six focus groups were held in November 2007:

- Citrus Springs 6:00 pm November 14
- Citrus Springs 8:00 pm November 14
- Ocala 6:00 pm November 19
- Ocala 8:00 pm November 19
- Crystal River 6:00 pm November 20
- Crystal River 8:00 pm November 20

Group sizes ranged from seven to thirteen participants, and all groups were moderated by Phillip Downs, Ph.D., Senior Partner of Kerr & Downs Research. Focus group screeners, scripts, and edited transcripts of discussions are contained in the Appendix.

Recommendations

Messaging

Participants in the focus groups were not very helpful in selecting one strong message or one preferred medium for communicating about proper septic tank maintenance, proper fertilizing techniques, and the relationship of each to polluting water bodies. One clear conclusion was that it is not enough to tell residents "know where it flows." Residents want to know what to do to prevent water pollution. "Know where it flows" was not disparaged by focus group participants, yet it does not present a call to action, which is what focus group participants wanted.

While past District communication campaigns have contained several actions that will help prevent water pollution from septic tanks and fertilizers, focus group participants want a simpler communication piece. The District should address fewer talking points in all communications. For example, include fewer items on a checklist of DOs and DON'Ts. Checklists in communication pieces should focus on actions that residents feel will have the most impact and actions they are willing to take. Here are the key actions to highlight:

- Fertilizer
  - Use less
  - Use less often
  - Use organic
  - Use slow release
- Septic Tanks
  - Inspect every 3 years
  - Watch what you put in your toilets and drains – it can come back to you.

The message should focus on **negative impacts** of improper fertilizing and improper septic tank maintenance **on the target market**. The message has to be **personalized.** The target needs to personally feel the pain or gain. Everyone cares about fish (from a past campaign), but fish are way down the list of things that cause us real pain or create real joy. And while the wedding scene in a past campaign resonated with some focus group participants, any special occasion scenario with (out-of-town) guests such as holidays resonated with more participants.

Participants use proper fertilizing techniques not because they are trying to limit pollution of nearby water bodies but because they believe it will result in prettier lawns, flowers, and plants. Messaging should focus on how proper fertilization techniques will result in prettier lawns, flowers, and plants while saving residents money from over fertilization.

Before/after pictures of local water bodies will be effective in illustrating the impact of improper fertilizing and improper septic tank maintenance. Pictures from the 1950s compared to recent pictures of local water bodies will be effective. Alternatively, pictures of more pristine local water bodies now versus pictures of less pristine local water bodies will also be effective. Including children, fishermen, or other characters only segments the audience. The message does not have to be negative and the tone should not be scolding. The pictures will speak for themselves. Since the District has a limited budget, **let the target imagine themselves in the scene**. This will guard against residents feeling that the picture does not relate to them.

Since the District competes with Coca Cola, Microsoft, the American Cancer Society, Citrus County School System, General Motors, etc., for residents' attention to messaging, it will be important to simplify messaging, design, and layout for all media. All communication must have the same look and feel so residents start to associate water protection messaging with the District.

Media

There are no "magic bullet" recommendations regarding the best media for communicating the District's message. When dropped into the communication pool to which residents are exposed daily, the District has limited ammunition. The District must leverage its budget through public relations, buzz marketing, and viral marketing. The integrated marketing firm working with the District will have ideas about leveraging the budget.

Master gardeners were identified as believable and trusted sources of information on fertilizing techniques and they should be used in a communication campaign on fertilizing.

The District should incorporate homeowners associations into the process of communicating its message. First, some homeowners associations hire lawn services and thus control fertilizing for an entire neighborhood. Second, neighborhood associations meetings represent a personal and efficient process for distributing information to homeowners.

Focus

The District is interested in communicating the deleterious affects of improper fertilizing and improper septic tank maintenance to residents. Participants in focus groups believed that fertilizer results in more water pollution than septic tanks. Participants also understand fertilizing and its impact on water bodies more so than they understand septic tanks and resultant impacts on water bodies. The District should consider limiting an initial communication campaign to fertilizers. This will give the District an opportunity to have a greater impact with its limited budget.

Participants believed that golf courses and agriculture have a far more negative impact on water bodies resulting from fertilizer use than homeowners. This misconception should be addressed in communication pieces.

What is the District?

The District's tagline appears to be "Balancing Water Needs… Protecting Water Resources," yet focus group participants were more likely to have a negative rather than a positive perception of the District. In order for the District's communication strategies (present and future) to be effective, residents must have a more positive perception of the District and understand what it stands for.

While beyond the scope of this project, it is apparent that the District should consider a branding strategy replete with branding research. Branding is much more than a tagline, logo, and branding manual. Branding must consider every touchpoint between the District and the public it serves. Effective branding includes: (1) human resources (hiring, training, supervising and rewarding personnel who interface with the public), (2) empowering frontline people who have interaction with the public to make good decisions for the benefit of the public and the District, (3) consistent messaging, look and feel, (4) market research to gage the public's perceptions of the District, the success of water-related decisions, and the success of marketing strategies, (5) a commitment by the board and senior management of the District to be "on brand" in all efforts, (6) identifying and training all spokespersons for the District in how to communicate the brand, and (7) a commitment among the board and senior management to identify and implement strategies that reinforce the brand.

Findings

Fertilizer Use

Each focus group explored residents' thoughts about impacts of improper septic tank maintenance and fertilizer use on pollution of water bodies. Approximately half of each focus group was devoted to each potential issue. In half of the focus groups, the impact of fertilizers was explored first, while the impact of improper septic tank maintenance was examined first in the remaining focus groups.

Benefits of Using Fertilizer

To get participants thinking about fertilizer use, the first question required them to write down and discuss benefits of using fertilizer. Most responses focused on making their grass green and helping their plants grow. Selected comments include:

- Keeps the grass alive.
- Healthy lawn, green grass, and longer flowering time.
- Growing better crops, from citrus right down to the lawn.

Top of Mind Problems Associated with Using Fertilizer

As shown in Table 1, three out of four focus group participants listed problems for water bodies or water environments when asked to write down problems that result from using fertilizer. This compares to fewer than half of participants who mentioned that improper septic tank maintenance can result in pollution of water bodies and the aquifer.

TABLE 1

Focus group	Identified water pollution as problem resulting from fertilizing
Ocala 6pm	5 of 7 people
Ocala 8pm	7 of 10 people
Citrus Springs 6pm	8 of 9 people
Citrus Springs 8pm	10 of 13 people
Crystal River 6pm	8 of 9 people
Crystal River 8pm	5 of 9 people
Total	**43 of 57 people**

Comments from individuals who identified water pollution as a problem resulting from fertilizing included the following:

- Water problems like runoff. Pollution.
- Nitrogen pollution. Excessive algae growth.
- Adds toxic waste to the water system.
- It gets into the rivers and causes algae blooms. It kills all the fish and screws up the rivers and lakes.
- Lakes, wells, and rivers. Pollution and over fertilization that is going into the aquifers, but it also goes into the lakes and rivers. You see a lot of these lakes that are all green and sludge all over, and it's nothing but the algae that is growing, weeds, and fish kill.
- The fertilizer goes down the aquifer and pollutes waterways, which eventually harms us.

Some participants questioned the need to use fertilizer, while others thought there were no problems associated with using fertilizer.

- You can apply it every day as long as you apply the right amount.
- If you have Florida-friendly lawns, why do you need anything?
- If I had it my way, Bahia grass would be the only kind of grass that you could have in Florida because you can go months and months without watering it and it'll continue to grow.
- There's been a couple of years that I forgot to fertilize in August and September and there has been no difference in my lawn the following year.

Actions for Assuring that Fertilizing Does Not Pollute Water Bodies

Focus group participants were asked to write down (individually and independently) actions (other than not fertilizing) that could be taken to prevent fertilizing from polluting water bodies. Most ideas for reducing the impact of fertilizers on water bodies involved using less fertilizer, using organic fertilizers, or using slow release fertilizers. These actions are more on the top of residents' minds and most likely easier for them to adopt if they have not already.

Many participants also mentioned using Florida-friendly plants and grasses. Only a few groups identified "following instructions" on the fertilizer packaging as a solution, hence not many individuals listed this as an action to take. Few participants listed not fertilizing near water bodies as a solution since they did not live near water bodies.

A listing of all ideas identified is shown in Table 2. The numbers on the following page in Table 2 (e.g., 11 under Citrus Springs 6pm for "use less fertilizer/less frequently") reflect how much support an action had as a potential solution for keeping fertilizer out of water bodies. Each focus group participant was given ten "dots" that they could assign to actions they thought were best at making sure that fertilizers did not pollute nearby water bodies. Participants could assign up to four "dots" to any given action. Consequently, actions with higher scores are actions that participants felt were better for ensuring that fertilizer does not pollute nearby water bodies.

TABLE 2

Actions	Citrus Springs 6pm	Citrus Springs 8pm	Crystal River 6pm	Crystal River 8pm	Ocala 6pm[1]
Use less fertilizer/less frequently	11	16	17	6	18
Use compost	8				2
Use slow release fertilizer		6	20	13	
Use organic fertilizer		10	13	12	17
Follow instructions			16	5	10
Don't fertilize near water bodies			7		10
Know the soil/fertilizer needed		10			15
Use native plants/grasses	18	9	11	25	
Learn to love weeds					15
Use proper number of plants	3				
Have smaller yards				14	
Educate your friends to do the same	5	8			
Talk to your lawn service					
Do not cut down native trees, shrubs	18	9			
Water lawn less		9			
Use gray water		10			
Use rain barrels to collect water		8			
Use a professional lawn service		5			
Don't fertilize near water bodies		18			
Plant xeriscapes		9			

[1] Ocala 8pm group did not do this exercise.

Proper Fertilizer Use

Frequency. Participants' views on the proper frequency of fertilizer use varied considerably from four or five times a year to yearly.

Distance from water bodies. Most participants believed that fertilizer should not come as close to water bodies (within 3 to 12 feet) as indicated in the District's materials. Opinions ranged from 25 to 500 feet. Most participants were merely guessing and most did not live near water bodies.

Phosphates. Most participants were uncertain whether or not their fertilizer contained phosphates.

- I don't know if mine has phosphorous in it or not (most agreed). Haven't they taken that out of most fertilizers (most did not know one way or the other even though most participants claimed they read the ingredients on the package).

Use Fertilizer Appropriately

In some of the groups, participants were given an opportunity to check if they followed certain steps that constitute proper fertilizer use. The table below summarizes the results.

21 of 24	Read and follow instructions on fertilizer bag or pesticide container.
18 of 24	Use slow release fertilizer, especially during the rainy season.
7 of 24	Don't fertilize before storms.
10 of 24	Leave a 3 to 12 foot no pesticide, no fertilizing zone around water bodies.
11 of 24	Plant a buffer of Florida-friendly trees and shrubs to reduce erosion and absorb runoff.
18 of 24	Use the appropriate fertilizer spreader so fertilizer does not get distributed in clumps or spread too heavily.
6 of 24	Use fertilizer with no phosphorous.

Nearly all residents claimed to read and follow instructions on the fertilizer bag, and three out of four use slow release fertilizer and use an appropriate fertilizer spreader. Fewer than half of residents follow the other proper fertilizer applications.

It was interesting to note that participants were more likely to follow instructions on the fertilizer bag so their plants and grass would prosper rather than out of concern for fertilizer getting into water bodies. They also made certain that their fertilizer spreaders worked correctly to ensure good lawns, not to ensure that fertilizer kept from getting into water bodies.

Only 7 of 24 participants quizzed said they do not fertilize before storms. There was some confusion regarding the best time to fertilize. Some participants recited instructions on fertilizer bags about watering after fertilizing. They interpreted this instruction to justify fertilizing before storms. Other participants realized that heavy rains will wash away fertilizer.

Motivating the Community to Fertilize Properly

Participants were told to imagine they were CEOs of an environmental organization whose goal was to educate the community about proper fertilizing techniques and the danger to water bodies if proper fertilizing techniques were not followed. They were asked to write down the most powerful message that should be communicated to the community and to indicate the most effective methods for communicating this message. Table 3 shows participants' messages.

TABLE 3

Citrus Springs 6pm

- What will we leave for our children?
- Stop killing our rivers.
- Use fertilizer responsibly.
- Use Bahia grass.
- Would you drink fertilizer?
- Would you swim in fertilizer!
- Follow directions.
- Your actions will affect your children's future.
- Show them before and after pictures of a polluted lake or river.
- STOP! (Show a fish choking).
- Fertilizer. Think before using!

Citrus Springs 8pm

- Picture of a crying Indian (Native American – a few participants agreed with this)
- Use a picture showing the effects of pollution rather than a pristine scene with children fishing and swimming (about half of participants agreed with this)
- Show a picture of sludge.

Ocala 6pm

- A very convincing ad on the disasters of no drinking water for our children and grandchildren.
- Show yards with drought-tolerant covering and shrubs.
- Health issues.
- You must stop the pollution of the water system. Select plants that are natural to Florida. If everyone would do this we can fix the problem.
- Pictures of contaminated bodies of water locally. Then detail proper methods of application of types of fertilizers. Supply phone number for help line.
- Restrict development and agriculture use near bodies of water.
- Make fertilizing bags have better instructions.
- Tell people about the problems.

Ocala 8pm

- Stop polluting our waterways.
- Give a hoot. Don't pollute.

Crystal River 6pm

- Go after their wallet. Explain how over-fertilization wastes money.
- Put a big danger sign on fertilizer bags.
- Children are the future – protect their water.
- Have a master gardener show people how to fertilize.

Mediums for Communicating Messages

Some participants felt the best approach was to focus on homeowners/neighborhood associations for getting the message out regarding proper fertilizing techniques.

- They even have communities with homeowners associations that get in there and do their own properties and treat every yard the same way. Work through homeowners associations so all homes will have the same (proper) fertilizing.
- Go to the community rather than having them come to you. Go to the homeowners association or civic associations and invite yourself to speak.
- That's a great idea because that would have much more of an impact with the number of people than something in the newspaper.
- Go to schools. Kids influence their parents.
- Have a demonstration yard so people can see the result of proper fertilizing techniques.
- Have master gardeners spread the word.
- How many times do we talk about needing to learn something at Home Depot? There is a master gardener at Home Depot. You can go to the garden department, talk to him, and he really knows his stuff.
- Have community meetings.

Participants felt that a master gardener would have more credibility than a spokesperson from the District.

Over half of participants mentioned traditional media (radio, television, billboards, direct mail) as the most effective methods for communicating a message about proper fertilizing techniques. The bottom line is that no medium for communicating really stood out in terms of participants' perceptions as to which would be most effective in convincing residents to use proper fertilizing techniques.

Lawn Services

Fewer than half of the focus group participants had lawn services. Most of the participants with lawn services did not discuss how much fertilizer to use with their services.

Septic Tank Maintenance

Top of mind problems associated with improper septic tank maintenance and water pollution.

Participants were asked to write down all problems emanating from improper septic tank maintenance. As shown in Table 4, while nearly all participants wrote issues relating to mess and expense, fewer than half wrote something about polluting nearby water bodies or the aquifer. Polluting water bodies or the water supply is not the first thing people think about when they think of problems resulting from improper septic tank maintenance.

TABLE 4

Focus group	Identified improper septic tank maintenance as a cause of water pollution
Ocala 6pm	4 of 7 people
Ocala 8pm	4 of 10 people
Citrus Springs 6pm	4 of 9 people
Citrus Springs 8pm	7 of 13 people
Crystal River 6pm	2 of 9 people
Crystal River 8pm	5 of 9 people
Total	**26 of 57 people**

Comments from individuals who identified water pollution as a problem resulting from improper septic tank maintenance included the following:

- Bad water going into the aquifer.
- I have a septic tank, but I'm afraid of it. One septic tank isn't a problem, but if you have too many septic tanks (in an area), I think you're going to have a problem with the aquifer.
- It seeps into the water supply.

Perceived Benefits of Proper Septic Tank Maintenance

Most benefits of proper septic tank maintenance identified by participants did not focus on maintaining the quality of water bodies or the aquifer. Most benefits focused on saving money and avoiding messes.

Actions for Assuring Septic Tank Does Not Pollute Water Bodies

Individually, participants were modestly successful in identifying actions they could take to keep their septic tanks from polluting nearby water bodies. However, participants were much more successful in identifying actions when they discussed the issue. Disposing of chemicals properly, limiting items that one puts down the drain, using Riddex, inspecting septic tanks, and self-educate were actions selected most frequently by focus group participants for ensuring that septic tanks did not pollute nearby water bodies.

All actions identified by individuals in the group were written on flipchart sheets. Participants were then given ten "dots" to distribute among the actions that were most effective in preventing septic tanks from polluting nearby water bodies. A maximum if four "dots" could be placed on each action. Participants' actions for ensuring that septic tanks did not pollute nearby water bodies and the number of "dots" for each action are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

Actions	Citrus Springs 6pm	Citrus Springs 8pm	Crystal River 6pm	Crystal River 8pm	Ocala 6pm	Ocala 8pm
Maintain/use toilets properly	9		4	8		
Low flow toilets/flush less	6		6			
Septic tank-safe (or less) toilet paper	3	1	7			
Use Riddex	2	11	17		10	9
No garbage disposal	9	5			8	
Use a strainer in the drain		8				
Have septic tank inspected	11	9		14	7	21
Repair septic tank		2			2	
Use less water	5		6			
Have septic tank pumped	6	18		9		23
Dispose of chemicals properly/not down drain		24	17	9	6	15
Know location of drain field			9			
Have proper size/location of drain field		11	16	10	5	5
Use yeast/bacteria		3	3	14	5	
Take hazardous materials to the dump			16			
Do not use phosphate detergent		2	5	4	6	3
Have proper size septic tank		6				
No trees/shrubs near septic tank			3		9	12
Education	10	8	10		9	

Incidence of Septic Tank Problems

About one in four focus group participants had experienced septic tank problems in the past. Experience with septic tank problems did not appear to impact participants' sensitivity to proper septic tank maintenance and water pollution or identification of actions to prevent water pollution from improper septic tank maintenance. Most participants immediately thought that there was a problem (rather than routine maintenance) when they saw a septic tank truck in their neighbors' driveways.

Proper Septic Tank Maintenance

Perceptions of what represents proper septic tank maintenance varied considerably. Many participants felt there was no need to perform any type of maintenance on their septic systems. They had been told this by builders or septic system installers.

- My builder in 1994 told us not to worry about the septic tank saying it takes care of itself. We didn't touch the tank until 2004 when I said we needed to get this thing checked. It was in perfect condition. They say you need to get it pumped every three years, but that's only to keep them in business.
- The only thing you can do in maintaining a good septic tank is checking to see where the level is. And when it gets full, it needs to be pumped out. It's going to need to be pumped out regardless, but it goes right back into the ground somewhere.
- I don't know, but for my benefit, I can only tell you what I do. I add bacteria to it every two months to help enhance the breakdown of what goes into the septic tank.

In some of the groups, participants were given an opportunity to check if they followed certain steps that constitute proper septic tank mainenance. The table below summarizes the results.

3 of 15	Have your septic tank inspected every 2-3 years and pumped as needed.
9 of 15	Take special effort to conserve water use.
15 of 15	Flush responsibly. Avoid using the toilet for disposing dental floss, feminine hygiene products, condoms, diapers, cotton swabs, cigarette butts, coffee grounds, and paper towels.
14 of 15	Do not flush household chemicals, gasoline, oil, pesticides, antifreeze and paint can.
13 of 15	Do not drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system.
11 of 15	Plant only turf or ground covers near your septic system rather than trees or shrubs.
6 of 15	Redirect rain gutters so runoff will flow into porous or vegetated areas away from the waterfront and septic drain field.

All particpant ssaid they flush responsibly, whilenearly all participatns claimed to not put the wrong items down their drains or toilets, and did not drive over their septic systems.

Proper Inspection and Pumping Out Intervals

Participants' ideas regarding proper inspection intervals varied widely. A few examples of participants' comments when asked how often they should have their septic systems inspected are shown below:

- Once a year.
- Every two years.
- Every five years.
- Whenever you have a problem.
- Every 7 to 10 years.
- Instead of having mine inspected, I just have it pumped out.

While there was some confusion whether or not inspection and pumping out a septic tank were two different actions, a majority perceived them to be. Selected comments are shown below:

- Yes (there is a difference between pumping it out and inspection). When you pump it you are clearing it out. And when you inspect it, you are having it checked for repairs, faults, maintenance.
- I don't know.
- I would say they are the same. Because for you to have it inspected you have to have it pumped out and you have to take everything out of it to be able to see what is wrong with it.
- You inspect to see if there were problems. Pumping would be to correct the problem.

Many questioned the need to have their septic system inspected as demonstrated by the following exchange among participants:

- The problem is that unless it backs up you assume it's working, right?
- If it doesn't back up, is it working right or not?
- Not necessarily.
- How can it not be working right if it doesn't back up?

- You could be leaking right through.
- Well, it fills up with sludge on the bottom and then just dumps the raw sewage out into your drain field instead of the bacteria breaking it down inside the tank.

No participants indicated that they had any input regarding the size or placement of their septic system if they were building a new home. Participants who knew where their system was located only knew because of greener grass in that area.

Proper interval between pumping out one's septic tank varied considerably as well, as evidenced by the comments shown below:

- Depends on the family size, but probably between 4 to 8 years.
- I had mine done once in 15 years.
- Once a year.
- When you sell your house.
- When it has problems.
- Every 10 years.
- Every 2 years.

Cost of Maintenance

Most participants had only a vague idea of how much it costs to get septic tanks inspected and how much it costs to have them pumped out. Estimates ran from less than a hundred dollars ($60 in one case) for an inspection to as much as $500. Costs for having a septic system pumped out ran from $155 to a high of $400. There was little resistance to the idea of having mandatory inspections if the cost was $50 to $75.

Motivating the Community to Maintain Septic Systems

Participants were told to imagine they were CEOs of an environmental organization whose goal was to educate the community about proper septic system maintenance and the danger to water bodies if proper maintenance routines were not followed. They were asked to write down the most powerful message that should be communicated to the community and to indicate the most effective methods for communicating this message. Table 6 shows participants' messages.

TABLE 6

Citrus Springs 6pm

- If you can smell it, you are doing it wrong.
- First educate myself so I would know what I was talking about.
- Use properly or pay!
- Don't let your toilet back up on our community.
- When it comes to the environment, we are all one.
- Prevent septic backups.
- Septic tanks. Use as directed.
- Do not use for any purpose except for its designed use (no paints & chemicals, drugs etc.).

Citrus Springs 8pm

- Proper septic tank maintenance is necessary to protect our waterways, aquifer, and drinking water supply – especially with the rapid growth of our county population.
- Avoid costly septic tank repairs. Maintain and use the septic system properly.
- Drink purer, live longer.
- Don't put chemicals down your drain. Save generations to come.
- Help save future generations, so don't put chemicals down your drain.
- Know where it flows for the future of your water.
- If you think it, would you drink it?
- Check or detect.
- It's the law. You must have you septic tank pumped and inspected by a licensed septic tank cleaner.
- You may be drinking what your neighbors pour down the drain.

Ocala 6pm

- Waste that goes in comes out in some form.
- Show public that good septic management helps everybody, but mostly yourself.
- What goes into septic goes into our water.
- Educate people on what a septic tank is and how it works.
- Proper septic tank care and use.
- Educate public.

Ocala 8pm

- Do regular maintenance and upkeep before your septic tank backs up.
- You need to do regular maintenance and inspections.
- Avoid using any kind of chemicals in your septic tank system.
- Show benefits of maintaining your septic and the cost and damage done by not maintaining your septic.
- It's easy, everyone can make a difference – Please do your part.
- Improper maintenance of your septic tank could be life threatening.
- To keep our water clean and safe for human use we must pay attention to our septic systems.

Crystal River 6pm

- We are fish and manatee friendly, and if we don't protect out water it will only hurt what makes Crystal River a great place to live.
- The water we drink could make us very sick as well. Protect our water and our recreation. Water is our future.
- Check your septic systems once a year.
- Education on the cost of repair to septic systems poorly taken care of.
- What you put into your septic tank may eventually come back to visit you!
- Have a demo on water purity.
- Proper septic maintenance = cleaner water.
- Don't fill your tanks and life will be better for you all around.
- You drink this water.
- Proper maintenance will cost less long term.

Crystal River 8pm

- Educate public on how to maintain septic tanks.
- Our water quality depends on you.
- With your help we can improve our natural habitat.
- Exhibit the costs of non-action.

While the messages suggested varied considerably, several participants mentioned the cycle of water, i.e., how we treat waste vis-à-vis septic tanks comes back to us through our drinking water. The following messages from different groups reinforce this theme:

- What you put into your septic tank may eventually come back to visit you!
- If you can smell it, you are doing it wrong.
- You may be drinking what your neighbors pour down the drain.
- What goes into septic goes into our water.
- Waste that goes in comes out in some form.
- You drink this water.

These messages build on the District's previous campaign theme: "Know Where It Flows." The unifying concept is that not only does your waste flow into water bodies, but it comes back to you through your drinking water. Adding the distasteful, no pun intended, result of the natural cycle to the message personalizes this issue.

Mediums for Communicating Messages

Participants were mixed when considering which methods for communicating the key message would be most effective. Many participants thought traditional media such as television, billboards, and radio would be most effective, while others thought mail would be most effective. Others thought that a personal touch using neighborhood associations would be most effective. Few participants mentioned the internet – this reflects the older demographics of homeowners in the study areas and older demographics of participants in the study.

Perceptions of the District

More individuals had a negative rather than a positive image of the District even though perceptions were based on limited information and nearly all participants had not met anyone from the District. A few groups were asked what the District does – responses follow:

- To take over for the Army Corps of Engineers.
- Allocate water resources.
- I have no idea.
- To control water levels in different areas and ensure that water is conserved.
- Political organization that allows government to bullshit us.
- Acquire lands for accumulation of water.
- I don't understand why all this political pressure is on them.
- Everyone is upset because they (SWFWMD) were going to take away water from Citrus County.
- SWFWMD decides our base water rates.
- They take our water, because it's clean. They need our water.
- They issue guidelines for water use.
- Yes, they do what they want to keep building (development) when we have no water.
- It's not only environmental, it's regulatory. How much certain areas can draw out of the aquifer. I know there's been a big discussion with the Silver Springs and St. Johns district and how much water can be drawn out.
- Code enforcement cop, and a brick wall because you can't get through to them.
- Too much government.
- Money – taxing you.
- Coming into our communities and taking our water because they need it for other areas.
- Bureaucracy – bad.
- Misguided. They allowed a private water bottling company to draw water, then they told everyone in the county to conserve water.
- They are allowing people to bottle that water, and telling us to conserve water at the same time. It just depends on who has the money – they rule.
- Most people I know think SWFWMD is a piece of crap. They are a bunch of bureaucrats in Brooksville trying to tell you how often to water your lawn. The system is so broken that no one wants to take responsibility for allowing another 10,000 houses when they are already claiming that water is in short supply.
- SWFWMD isn't getting their message out about what they really represent. Don't wait to be invited to speak at associations – just go.
- My problem with SWFWMD is what do they have to do with fertilizer? They manage water, but do they manage fertilizer? I don't think SWFWMD has the education to talk to us about fertilizer. It's not SWFFertilizer, it is water.
- No, I don't like SWFWMD. They mismanage the water. They control the flow, how fast or how slow.
- I think they need to be educated on what we are discussing here.

Most participants changed their attitude toward the District, or at least the tone of their discussion when District representatives introduced themselves at the end of each discussion and briefly explained what the District does.

Appendix

Focus Group Screener

Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD) - Screener

CHECK ONE: ❑ Crystal River – 11/14 at 6pm ❑ Ocala – 11/19 at 6pm ❑ Citrus Springs – 11/20 at 6pm
❑ Crystal River – 11/14 at 8pm ❑ Ocala – 11/19 at 8pm ❑ Citrus Springs – 11/20 at 8pm

Name _____

***Email address or fax** _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Night/home phone _____ Day/work phone _____

Interviewer _____ Date recruited _____

Hello, this is _____ calling in behalf of the Southwest Florida Water Management District. We're interested in your opinions and we'll pay you $40 for your assistance if you qualify.

1. Does your home have a septic tank?

____ Yes
____ No – THANK AND TERMINATE
____ Not sure – ASK TO SPEAK TO PERSON WHO KNOWS & REPEAT QUESTION

2. Have you fertilized your grass, flowers, or bushes or hired someone to do it for you in the past two years?

____ Yes
____ No – THANK AND TERMINATE
____ Not sure – ASK TO SPEAK TO PERSON WHO KNOWS & REPEAT QUESTION

3. To make sure we have a mix of people, please tell me which category represents your age: **READ**

____ Under 40 – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 5 PER GROUP
____ 40-60 – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 5 PER GROUP
____ Over 60 – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 5 PER GROUP

4. Which category represents your race or ethnic background: **READ**

____ Black or African American – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 3
____ Hispanic or Latino – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 3
____ White or Caucasian – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 9
____ Other – ACCEPT NO MORE THAN 2

5. [RECORD GENDER]

____ Male – ACCEPT 6
____ Female – ACCEPT 6

6. Again, we'll pay you $40 to participate in this discussion group. Would you be interested in participating?

____ Yes
____ No – THANK AND TERMINATE

7. Would you prefer the 6:00 group or the 8:00 group? **[RECORD ON FRONT PAGE OF SCREENER]**

____ 6:00 p.m.
____ 8:00 p.m.

CLOSING & INVITATION:

The focus group will be **[read correct date and time]** and will last 1½ hours. We'll pay you $40 to participate. Can we count on you to be there?

Crystal River – **Wednesday, November 14, 2007**
Crystal River City Hall (Council Chambers)
123 NW Highway 19
Crystal River, FL 34428
(352) 795-4216

Ocala – **Monday, November 19, 2007**
Residence Inn by Marriott
3610 SW 38th Ave.
Ocala, FL 34474
(352) 547-1600

Citrus Springs – **Tuesday, November 20, 2007**
Citrus Springs Community Center (Red Room)
1570 W. Citrus Springs Blvd.
Citrus Springs, FL 34434
(352) 465-7007

IF YES >>

- Record name, address, and both day and night telephone information on front of screener. **You MUST record either an email address or a fax number** so we can send the invitation and map.

Tell respondent:

- We'll be sending detailed information either in an email or by fax.
- Bring eye glasses if needed for viewing or reading.
- Please arrive 15 minutes early – we'll enter you into a drawing for a $25 bonus if you arrive 15 minutes early.

IF NO >>

- Attempt to convince respondent by repeating that he/she will be paid $40 and that we are not selling anything.
  - **If no >>** Thank and terminate

Recruit 12 for 8 to show for each group

Focus Group Script: Fertilizer Use & Septic Tank Maintenance

Good evening. My name is Phillip Downs. Today we're going to be talking about fertilizer use and septic tank maintenance.

This discussion will last about an hour and a half. We are interested in your opinions – there are **no right or wrong answers,** only how you feel. There are no experts in this group, so don't be swayed by others' opinions – you're as smart as any one here. It is important that everyone get involved, so no one can talk too much. To help me remember everything you say, I am taping this discussion. Please turn off your cell phones, beepers, etc.
Let's start by having each of you give a brief personal *introduction.*
Let's focus on septic tank maintenance.
Please take a few minutes and write down on the ***left*** side of your paper all the **benefits** you can think of that result from improper septic tank maintenance or no maintenance at all.
DISCUSS

Now take a few more minutes and write down on the ***right*** side of your paper all of the **problems** that you can think of that result from improper septic tank maintenance or no maintenance at all.
DISCUSS

Some of you mentioned that one of the problems with improper or no septic tank maintenance is that nearby water bodies can become polluted. Please take a few minutes and ***write*** down all of the actions you can do to help **prevent** nearby water bodies from being polluted from your septic tanks.
DISCUSS & WRITE ACTIONS ON THE FLIP CHART PAPER ON THE WALL

Now as we review these actions, I'd like you to consider which ones are **most effective in preventing** your septic tanks from polluting nearby water bodies. You have *10 red dots* – come up to the wall and place your red dots next to the actions you think are most effective in preventing your septic tanks from polluting nearby water bodies. You *can place up to 4* dots on any given action.
DISCUSS

Pass out a list of actions (1 AT A TIME) for preventing septic tanks from polluting nearby water bodies.
(NOTE – these "actions" will be the "behavior study topics")
Please ***check*** if you do this (1st ACTION) on a **consistent basis.**
Let's see a show of hands. How many of you consistently READ ACTION 1.
Now **write** down on your paper why you **don't do/do** ACTION 1 consistently.
DISCUSS

Now write ***down a phrase*** or sentence that you think will best **motivate** people like you to do ACTION 1.
DISCUSS
REPEAT FOR EACH ACTION THAT SWFWMD RECOMMENDS.

If you were the president of a company whose goal it was to get homeowners to maintain their septic tanks properly, how would you get that message to them? In other words, what's the best way to inform homeowners about proper septic tank maintenance? Please take a minute and write down your strategy for informing homeowners.
EXPLORE – media.

How would **you** prefer to be informed of instructions for proper fertilizer use (internet, billboards, radio, newspaper, direct mail, TV)?

Now **let's focus on using fertilizers.**

Please take a few minutes and **write** down on the ***left*** side of your paper all the **benefits** you can think of that result from using fertilizers in your grass, bushes, and flowers.
DISCUSS

Now take a few more minutes and write down on the ***right*** side of your paper all of the **problems** that you can think of that result from using fertilizer on your grass, bushes, and flowers.
DISCUSS

Now at the *bottom* of your page, write down ***how often*** you **should** fertilize your yard, bushes, and flowers.
How many times is too often? DISUCSS

Some of you mentioned that one of the problems with using fertilizer is that it can get into water bodies and result in pollution. Please take a few minutes and **write** down all of the ***actions you can do to help prevent*** fertilizers from getting into water bodies.
DISCUSS & WRITE ACTIONS ON THE FLIP CHART PAPER ON THE WALL

Now as we review these actions, I'd like you to consider which ones are **most effective** in preventing fertilizers from getting into water bodies. You have *10 red dots* – come up to the wall and place your red dots next to the actions you think are most effective in preventing fertilizers from entering water bodies. You can *place up to 4 dots* on any given action.
DISCUSS

Pass out a list of actions (1 AT A TIME) for preventing fertilizers from getting into water bodies.
(NOTE – these "actions" will be the "behavior study topics")
Please ***check*** if you do this (1st ACTION) on a ***consistent basis.***
Let's see a *show of hands*. How many of you consistently READ ACTION 1?
Now write down on your paper why you **don't do/do** ACTION 1 consistently.
DISCUSS
Now **write down a phrase** or sentence that you think will best **motivate** people like you to do ACTION 1.
DISCUSS
REPEAT FOR EACH ACTION THAT SWFWMD RECOMMENDS.

If you were the president of an organization whose goal it was to get homeowners to fertilize their lawns **properly**, how would you get that message to them? In other words, what's the best way to inform homeowners about proper fertilizing **techniques beyond putting instructions on the fertilizer bags or having signs at shops selling fertilizer?** Please take a minute and write down your strategy for informing homeowners.
EXPLORE – media.
How would **you** prefer to be informed of instructions for proper fertilizer use (internet, billboards, radio, newspaper, direct mail, TV)?

Just curious – what **percentage of pollution** in nearby water bodies are homeowners responsible for by misusing fertilizers. Just **write** down a percentage for me.
DISCUSS

What's the best approach for telling people **how to** and **how not to** use fertilizer? Should we describe the entire scientific process or merely tell them what to do and what not to do?

Let's see a show of hands. How many of you **use landscape companies** to take care of your yard?
Do the landscape companies *apply fertilizer*?
Do you ***discuss*** proper fertilizer techniques with them or do you just assume they know what they are doing?