

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

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Watsonville acts to reduce toxic dumping

1,200 storm drains to get painted warnings

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Watsonville city officials are hopeful that people will read the writing on the curb the next time they try to dump used motor oil, grease, paint or other household chemicals into a storm drain.

Student, civic and business volunteers joined city workers Thursday in a six-month project aimed at reducing the number one source of pollution in streams,

rivers and oceans nationwide.

The message will be painted in English and Spanish on the curbs of about 1,200 storm drains in the city and will be very clear: "No dumping. Flows into the Monterey Bay," or waterways linked to the drain. Symbols of fish, sea-birds, and surfers will accompany the warning for those who cannot read.

"We don't think people realize that storm drains empty directly

into the bay, rivers, and creeks without going through a treatment facility first," said Bob Geyer, Watsonville's waste water division manager. "Once a chemical is dumped into a storm drain there is little the city can do to stop it."

Geyer said he sees a lot of oil, oil filters and other household waste such as antifreeze, flow into local rivers and the bay and he hopes the volunteer curb-painting program will reduce the amount of household pollution.

The stenciling project is just one avenue the city is taking to promote cleaner waterways as part of National Pollution Prevention Week, said Geyer.

Volunteers will also be going door-to-door during the next few months to hand out information about free disposal alternatives, including oil recycling and household hazardous waste disposal sites.

In addition, Geyer said, the city will supply a household with a 2½-gallon plastic bottle that they

can fill with dirty motor oil and leave for pick-up on garbage day. It will be processed at the city's recycling center.

HADCO Tech Center II, which manufactures printed circuit boards, is one of six Watsonville businesses that have agreed to stencil nearby storm drains as part of the city's pollution prevention measures.

Capitola and Scotts Valley are undertaking similar projects, said Geyer.