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Unprecedented Coalition Launches Effort to Save Puget Sound

More than 300 organizations get behind 'Puget Sound Starts Here' to tell residents of Puget Sound's impending death – and what can be done to halt it

SEATTLE, Wash. (Sept. 16, 2009) – A coalition of more than 300 Puget Sound organizations, including cities and counties, environmental and stewardship groups, businesses and universities today launched a ground breaking public education campaign to stop the daily flow of 140,000 pounds of toxic chemicals from entering Puget Sound.

The campaign, ***Puget Sound Starts Here*** (www.pugetsoundstartshere.org), tells residents how changes in their everyday actions can help save the Sound. The effort is the largest in history to save Puget Sound, and is led by the Puget Sound Partnership, S.T.O.R.M. (Stormwater Outreach for Regional Municipalities) and the Washington Department of Ecology.

“Puget Sound is dying, and many of us don’t realize that our own actions are contributing to its decline,” said David Dicks, director of the Puget Sound Partnership. “The ***Puget Sound Starts Here*** campaign illustrates the severity of the problem and explains how each of us can be part of the solution by changing a few everyday activities. Everyone who lives in the Puget Sound region can make a difference.”

Puget Sound's increasingly polluted waters threaten the region's economic health and quality of life.

- The Sound's fishing and shellfish industries, conservatively valued at \$147 million a year, are at risk.
- The \$9.5 billion annual tourism industry is in jeopardy.
- Transient and southern resident orca whales are considered to be among the most PCB-contaminated mammals on the planet.

Puget Sound Starts Here initially focuses on four common behaviors that most residents can easily adopt to reduce pollution from entering the Sound.

1. Take cars to a commercial car wash, where wash water is properly handled. Car wash water can kill fish and be as potentially toxic as some industrial wastewater discharges.
2. Fix car leaks, or place cardboard under the car in the short term to catch leaking oil or fluids.
3. Use compost – instead of fertilizers or pesticides – to grow a healthy lawn and garden.
4. Pick up pet waste with a bag – both in the yard and in public places – and place it in the trash.

Each of the behaviors addressed in ***Puget Sound Starts Here*** support the message that the Sound's problems start in our own backyards. Water from washing the car in a driveway or street carries oil, zinc, lead, copper and soap into storm drains that empty into rivers and streams that ultimately lead to Puget Sound. Stormwater runoff – which occurs when rainwater is not absorbed into the ground – picks up oil from car leaks, toxic yard chemicals from pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers, along with bacteria such as fecal coliform from pet waste. These harmful substances are also washed down storm drains. Washington's Department of Ecology estimates that 75 percent of the 140,000 pounds of toxic chemicals entering the Sound each day are carried by stormwater runoff.

Many people believe that wastewater treatment plants or other means clean water flowing into storm drains before it reaches local waterways and Puget Sound. This is not the case. Five hundred forty-nine (549) rivers, streams and lakes throughout the region

suffer from poor water quality and in many cases polluted stormwater runoff is a contributing factor.

“People cherish the Sound for its beauty, cultural heritage and economic importance,” said Jay Manning, director of the Washington Department of Ecology. “We want our children and grandchildren to enjoy the swimming, beachcombing and whale watching that are such an important part of life in the region. Everyone can take action to help protect and restore Puget Sound. As we’ve shown with recycling, it simply means doing things differently than we did before.”

The ***Puget Sound Starts Here*** campaign launches on Sept. 17 and includes television ads, a Web site and tools such as PowerPoint presentations for public outreach to local communities. Many organizations offer events that are free to the public and volunteer opportunities that support protecting Puget Sound. Information about these and other ways to become involved with ***Puget Sound Starts Here*** is available at www.pugetsoundstartshere.org.