

South Washington Watershed District Helps Cottage Grove Businesses go Blue

“Blue is the new green,” quipped advertising agency JWT in their prediction that businesses and homeowners would trend toward landscaping and building practices that are good for clean water. These blue practices include native plant landscaping that requires no irrigation, pesticides or fertilizers, features like raingardens and porous pavement that help to soak polluted stormwater into the ground, and indoor water saving features such as low-flow toilets and front-loading washing machines.

Businesses have quickly learned that going blue has its advantages. Not only can they gain the respect of eco-conscious customers, but also they can save considerable money on grounds maintenance and correct pesky problems like parking lot flooding, hillside erosion and deteriorating pavement. A new website, www.cleanwatermn.org/businesses, outlines several blue practices for commercial property owners and also includes case studies from local businesses.

You can see dozens of examples in Cottage Grove of businesses, homeowners and public entities going blue. The Cottage Grove Park and Ride was one of the first sites in the county to use raingardens to treat parking lot runoff and the Metropolitan Council has also planted large native prairie areas at the Eagle Point Wastewater Treatment Plant. When Washington County built the new South Service Center three years ago, they teamed up with South Washington Watershed District (SWWD) and Washington Conservation District (WCD) to install large bioretention cells (a fancy word for engineered raingardens) to protect Cottage Grove Ravine from runoff. Last year, SWWD helped All Saints Lutheran Church to transform a large turf area into a raingarden that captures and infiltrates 40% of the stormwater runoff from the building, parking lot and grounds. The garden brings beauty to the church property while also serving to protect the nearby Mississippi River from pollution.

This spring, the SWWD and WCD have embarked on an innovative project to diagnose and prescribe treatment for stormwater pollution along the Highway 61 commercial corridor in Cottage Grove, which drains to the Mississippi River. Using a combination of computer modeling software, maps and aerial photos, and on-the-ground research, project staff are selecting key locations along the corridor where stormwater ponds, raingardens and other landscaping features can be added to reduce runoff pollution. As part of this project, SWWD and WCD will be offering a funding and technical assistance package to commercial property owners along with one-on-one consultations to help them select and install the most effective and cost-efficient practices for their properties.

Along with the Hwy 61 commercial retrofit project, South Washington Watershed District also offers cost-share grants to residents and businesses to install rain barrels, raingardens, porous pavement and other practices that reduce runoff pollution. To learn more about these grants or request a free site visit for your home or business, visit www.swwdmn.org or contact John Loomis at jloomis@ci.woodbury.mn.us or (651) 714-3714.