

Blackstone Valley TRIBUNE



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Douglas joins regional environmental group

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DOUGLAS — The Board of Selectmen has registered this community to participate in an anti-pollution program called "In Business for the Blackstone."

It was last December the selectmen, after an address by Dona Neely of the Blackstone River Coalition (BRC), began contemplating the possibility of joining the group dedicated to encouraging business and municipalities to minimize pollution from storm water.

Neely, accompanied by Peter Coffin last week, again laid out the merits of the program to the Board of Selectmen at a Feb. 20 meeting. The program is sponsored by Wheelabrator Millbury Inc., a waste management company.

Now that Douglas has joined "In Business for the Blackstone," it will become part of the leadership program headed by the coalition and aimed primarily at businesses. But municipal governments are of concern, too.

In addition to helping protect local water bodies from the effects of rain and snowmelt, the leadership program confers public recognition on those who support the campaign, according to the coordinators.

Of course, Neely was not talking about nice, clean water entering, say, the Mumford River. That would be a welcome alternative to what used to be the case as recently as the 1960s and early 1970s, when toilets flushed directly into the Mumford and a local mill expelled dye and soap suds into the river, sometimes rolling

large soap balls across Gilboa Street.

But storm runoff can still carry with it things like fertilizer, plastics, and other debris that can pollute rivers, lakes and streams.

That is what Neely expressed concern about.

In fact, she explained, "polluted storm runoff is the most significant unaddressed cause of water quality problems today."

Precipitation that runs across paved surfaces collects contaminants such as chemicals, oil, metals, litter, and debris, carrying them to storm drains and then to local water bodies, according to Neely and Coffin.

Last December, Neely explained to the board how small changes in a company's practices can prevent such contaminants from finding their way into public waterways.

"If your business uses a dumpster, accepts deliveries at a loading dock, uses toxic chemicals, maintains a fleet of vehicles, has a lawn area, and/or owns a parking lot, Neely said at that time, "In Business for the Blackstone" can be relevant."

Any company in the Blackstone River Watershed that is not required by state law to carry out a storm water management program can be involved with "In Business for the Blackstone," according to Neely. She said joining the program can give a business recognition "that can provide it with a unique competitive advantage and strengthen its position within the community. Rewards, she said, include a window decal, a certificate, a photo, and recognition in press releases. Explaining what a company

has to do to be included in the program, Neely said it has to establish a few "no-or-low-cost, good-housekeeping practices..." She said the program focuses on measures easy to adopt and provides guidance on how to use them.

Three reasons, she said, for adopting the program, are:

- Having a facility that impresses customers and makes employees proud.
- Minimizing business risks and operational expenses.
- Protecting the health of community residents, wildlife and local waterways.

The impetus for organizations like the Blackstone River Coalition and its "In Business for the Blackstone" program dates back to 1948, although what became the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, popularly known as the Clean Water Act, was an expansion and improvement of the previous act.

Primary authority for implementing and enforcing the Clean Water Act lies with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Beyond what was stipulated before 1972, the act "authorizes water quality programs, requires federal effluent limitations and state water quality standards, requires permits for the discharge of pollutants into navigable waters, provides enforcement mechanisms, and authorizes funding for wastewater treatment works, construction grants and state revolving loan programs..." Provisions have also been made to address water quality problems in specific regions and waterways.

"By making small, no- or low-

cost changes in... a company's daily routines," Neely said, hypothetically addressing business owners last December, "you can play a major role in protecting our water bodies and supporting the Blackstone River Coalition's goal of making the Blackstone 'fishable and swimmable by 2015.'"

To be included in the "In Business for the Blackstone" program, a company must do five or more of 10 practices:

- Clean and maintain storm drains and catch basins regularly.
- Keep parking lot and loading area clean.
- Design lot features that infiltrate, filter, or detain runoff.
- Use environmentally sensitive landscaping practices.
- Ensure dumpsters remain closed and leak-proof.
- Move stored materials indoors or keep properly covered.
- Wash vehicles and equipment responsibly.
- Conduct routine maintenance on vehicles to prevent leaks.
- Make a spill-response plan and cleanup kit accessible.
- Train employees in good housekeeping practices.

"For those companies that incorporate seven or more of the above recommendations," Neely said, "the BRC will highlight the accomplishments in a feature article it will distribute to local media, share with the company for its own public relations, post on the Web site, and include in a future BRC newsletter."

More information is available at dona.neely@zaptheblackstone.org or by calling (508) 878-1728.