

Eastside Environmental News

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative



MAY 2010
ISSUE 1

Austin Clean Water Program Helps Keep Creeks Cleaner

Thanks to the tremendous effort of the Austin Clean Water Program, creeks in Austin are now cleaner and healthier.

Nearly eight years ago, the City began this program to fix the City's sanitary sewer system and to reduce sewage overflows that were affecting creeks and waterways. The City faced heavy fines from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) if it did not complete the project by June of 2009.

However, the program was completed by the spring, ahead of schedule, and EPA ended its enforcement action against the City.

The \$400 million program involved 100 separate projects in 70 neighborhoods. This included replacing or repairing nearly 200 miles of pipe; eliminating 10 sewage lift stations; rerouting miles of sewer pipes away from streams; restoring stream banks; and improving response time to calls about sewer emergencies.

As a result of this program, there has been a dramatic drop in the volume and number of sewage overflows. In fact, recent testing shows that water quality has improved in at least a dozen of Austin's creeks. The City's testing involved two types of tests. One test uses several criteria to produce an environmental score that represents a "big-picture" water quality result. The second test is for ammonia, which can be an indicator of the presence of human sewage. In addition, these test results indicate that water quality improvements were most significant in East Austin creeks such as, Fort Branch above Manor Road, Tannehill Creek at Lovell Drive, Buttermilk Creek at Little Walnut Creek and Little Walnut Creek at U.S. 183.

Last year, this program was voted one of the top 10 infrastructure projects in North America in the last 75 years by The International Right of Way Association. The selection was based on projects that have had the "greatest impact on the American quality of life".



Crews digging trench for new wastewater line.

Field Notes...



Oscar Garza

GREEN, GREEN, GREEN. Unless you've been hiding under a rock lately, you know that GREEN is the color to be. Green is everywhere. Green cities, green houses, green cars, even green festivals. But what does it all mean? It means that you want to live your life in an environmentally responsible and resource-efficient manner. It involves everything we do, from using renewable energy resources to the support of environmentally friendly products as opposed to those that pollute or harm the environment.

The City of Austin is one of the leaders in the nation in this effort. To help keep East Austin fully informed and prepared to meet the Green Challenge, we have expanded the Initiative's outreach goals to include conservation efforts. This goal has been endorsed by the City Council and the Initiative will be putting our efforts into this endeavor.

In our latest newsletter, you'll find articles about how we can all do our part to join in the green movement. Read how your community can become a "Green Neighborhood". You may think about how to put your best green effort forward by recycling your household trash to make East Austin a better place. Also, see how Austin Brownfields' Revitalization Office continues to work with the East Austin community to transform brownfields - underutilized or polluted properties - into new, green, neighborhoods and businesses.

As always, please feel free to contact me at 974-1893 or at oscar.garza@ci.austin.tx.us

24 Hour Pollution Hotline 974-2550
Línea de la contaminación, atiende 24 horas al día

RECYCLING...What is it good for? Absolutely everything!

Recycling is about the easiest thing anyone can do to help keep our environment clean. Here in Austin, it's so easy because you simply put all your recyclables in the big blue carts the City has provided you. That's it! You don't have to separate any recyclable materials or worry about what bin to put them in. And you can feel good that you've done your part to reduce pollution and improve air and water quality, save precious natural resources for your kids and for future generations. Amazing what you can do with one simple act.

What should you recycle?

- Paper/cardboard, including newspapers, magazines, cereal and other food boxes
- Plastic containers for milk, juice and sodas
- Glass jars and bottles of all colors
- Aluminum and steel cans such as soda and vegetable cans

Don't put any food, plastic bags or Styrofoam in the blue carts. Plastic bags can be recycled by placing in designated bins at your local grocery store. It's important to dispose of all trash properly because no one wants to see plastic grocery bags blowing in the wind, broken glass in our parks, or plastic bottles floating where we swim. Cleaning up litter costs everyone.

The City of Austin has provided you with a FREE blue cart for recycling, but you do have to pay for your regular trash cart. Now, here's a little secret. When you go grocery shopping, pay attention and buy groceries in containers that can be recycled or reused. The more you recycle in the blue cart the less trash you put in your regular cart. Since you have less trash to throw away, you can exchange your bigger regular trash cart for a smaller cart...and pay less. Just call 311 if you want to exchange for a smaller cart.



So now you know, recycling is easy, helps the environment, keeps your neighborhood clean, and it can put a few extra coins in your pocket. For more information on recycling, visit www.ci.austin.tx.us/sws/residential_singlestream.htm

Austin Youth River Watch Program Expands

By Jacob Daniel Apodaca

Recently, the Austin Youth River Watch Program (AYR-WP) expanded its capacity to reach more students in the Austin Independent School District.



The AYRWP was established in 1991 under the umbrella of the Colorado River Watch Foundation as an environmental outreach program targeting high school students considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. The program's mission is to promote community-based environmental monitoring, awareness, and education while inspiring and advancing personal and scholastic achievement.

On a typical day, students meet after school to test water quality on Austin's creeks or on the Colorado River. The data is submitted to the Colorado River Watch Network. They also conduct macroinvertebrate (very small spineless organisms) assessments and stream surveys.

Newer students to the program learn the testing procedures from the more experienced students and from the program coordinators. After conducting the water quality tests and field observations, they do their homework at the program's center, assisting each other or receiving tutoring from interns and volunteers. They are also provided with opportunities to learn about environmental careers and keep personal journals.

Students go on camping trips at least twice each semester. At least one of the camp-outs each year revolves around a study during which students conduct water quality tests every hour for 24 hours. This hands-on experience illustrates daily cycles in water quality.

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River Watch participants are offered numerous traveling experiences to places like Russia, Wisconsin, Washington D.C., Big Bend National Park and many state parks in Texas. The students' field trips emphasize environmental career paths and are designed to expand students' hori-

zons, and provide a better understanding of physical and cultural geography, ecology and natural processes.

You can find more information at www.lcra.org/water/quality/crwn/index.html or www.ayrw.org/



October 24th International Climate Action Day! Volunteers from the neighborhood, ABRO, City of Austin Solid Waste Services, University of Texas Center for Sustainable Development, School of Architecture, Austin Community Design and Development Center, and the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation cleared tons of debris from an East Austin brownfield site.

Another East Austin Brownfield Gone Green! -Marilyn E. Jones

Tires, wood scraps and other debris riddled the 11-acre property off Tillery and Goodwin Streets in East Austin. Recently, about five tons of household material and 244 tires were removed from this 11-acre brownfields property. Brownfields are properties that are idle due to their past use and unknown environmental history. The Tillery-Goodwin property was a historical illegal dump site that is being transformed into home sites targeted for low-to-moderate income families. The City's Austin Brownfields Revitalization Office (ABRO) funded several environmental studies and a cleanup plan on the property. The cleanup plan activities have begun.

Upon completion of the cleanup, the property owner (Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation) anticipates receipt of a "Certificate of Completion"

from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The planned revitalization by this non-profit community development group is to build an affordable subdivision with 80-90 homes and townhomes which will sell for \$50,000 to \$150,000. The homes will also be equipped with solar-electric and solar-thermal energy features.

The City's Austin Brownfields Revitalization Office leverages and partners with eligible brownfield property owners, neighborhood groups, community organizations, and governmental entities to address the reuse of brownfield properties. If you know of a brownfield or think there is one in your community, please contact Catherine Esparza at 512-974-1954

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Where to Call for Pollution Information & Assistance

CITY OF AUSTIN NUMBERS

General non-emergency
311

Health & Human Services Department
972-5600

Austin Clean Water Partners Program
974-2550

East Austin Environmental Initiative
974-1893

Pollution Hotline (24 Hr.)
974-2550

Household Hazardous Waste program
974-4343

Public Information Office
974-2220

Solid Waste Services Customer Service
494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints
974-3355

Austin Water Utility
(sewage complaints 24 Hr.)
972-1000

Zoning and Building Use Complaints
974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office
974-1954

OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority
473-3307

CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 974-2250

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Martinez 974-2264

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Chris Riley 974-2260

Laura Morrison 974-2258

Randi Shade 974-2255

Bill Spellman 974-2256

Sheryl Cole 974-2266



TAKE THE GREEN CITY CHALLENGE, AUSTIN!

Confused by all the attention on being "green"? Trying to figure out how you can do your part to protect our climate, water and air while still conserving water and our many natural resources?

The City of Austin has solved the problem with its updated Green Neighbor program. Previously geared to water quality protection strategies, the program is now greatly expanded to provide Austinites with a comprehensive guide to environmental protection. The new booklet is a compilation of action items that include tips for saving energy and water, and reducing air pollution, gardening chemicals and waste. Eleven City departments collaborated on the effort that is subtitled the Green City Challenge. We are challenging citizens to test their environmental expertise and better yet, to change their habits and become Green Neighbors.

The booklet serves as a resource for Austinites. It contains not only action items, but stats on why these green strategies are beneficial. It also lists contact information and websites for City rebates and program information. Austinites can learn how to enjoy the environment with links to our parks and preserves or to simply find the best bus route to work.

The program has its rewards. Each action item has an associated score and if an individual or family reaches the Green Neighbor scoring goal, they can receive either a free t-shirt or a pass to Barton Springs Pool. If they want to partner with neighbors or co-workers, they can become a Green Neighborhood to receive website recognition and other benefits.

The Challenge is available online at www.cityofaustin.org/watershed/greenneighbor or booklets are available at all Austin public libraries. To request a larger quantity of guides, please call 974-2446.

 printed on recycled paper

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