



John Cox

# Reducing Rain Pollution

Rain barrels are one way the Think About Personal Pollution (TAPP) program in Tallahassee works to improve water quality in northwest Florida. Program Director John Cox spoke with *Water Quality Products* Associate Editor Jeff Zagoudis to explain how these devices can turn a potent source of pollution into a boon for local consumers.

## Jeff Zagoudis: How much of a problem is rainwater in Florida?

**John Cox:** Rainwater is actually the biggest pollution source in Florida; we average about 66 in. of rainfall in Tallahassee every year. It takes all sorts of chemicals and waste and washes them into public water sources. This is why animal waste is a large part of the problem too—especially [from] dogs.

## Zagoudis: What types of community outreach and education programs does TAPP provide?

**Cox:** Our program was designed to improve water quality, primarily nutrients and bacterial contamination, in the three regional lake basins that we have here in Tallahassee. We focus our efforts on getting people to reduce their personal pollution.

The television public service announcements (PSAs) we have produced have won a lot of awards—a lot of ADDY awards. We have also done two on pet waste and they have both won Emmy awards. We have produced quite a few outreach brochures on taking care of your yard, fertilization and picking up your pet waste, to name a few. The State Environmental Educational Task Force is a big help in distributing information for us across the state.

We have a lot of information on our website, including a series of videos that we run during the early spring/summer gardening season. All of these efforts are ongoing. You may not have as intense a program every year, but you cannot stop.

## Zagoudis: What are some of the benefits of rain barrels for homeowners and the environment?

**Cox:** Obviously they reduce the amount of runoff that reaches various water supplies. An ordinary rain barrel can hold 50 to 60 gal of rainwater at a time, which comes to about 1,000 gal annually. Once it is there, it can be parceled out however people see fit.

## Zagoudis: Can any large container be used as a rain barrel?

**Cox:** You could just put a large bucket under your roof, but the problem is it is open to the elements. If you leave it full of water for any length of time, you will attract bugs, especially mosquitoes, here in Florida. There is also the risk of leaves and other

debris getting in the bucket, further contaminating the rainwater.

The earliest rain barrels were often repurposed containers, particularly old pickle barrels. The key is to have a screen on top to let the water in but keep everything else out. The more elaborate rain barrels actually have a lid, and you have to drill a hole in that and connect it directly to the downspout.

## Zagoudis: Where can people get rain barrels? Can they make them at home?

**Cox:** You can get all the parts to make your own rain barrel from your local garden supply store. It will probably cost you about \$50 to build one yourself. You can also buy them pre-made if you want. Every year, the city of Tallahassee hosts a rain barrel drive with a local company; their barrels run \$55 to \$60. For 2012, we are working with that same company to give people the ability to buy rain barrels online.

## Zagoudis: What can excess rainwater be used for?

**Cox:** Probably the biggest single use would be for irrigation. The rainwater in Florida has a high nitrate content, so it can act as a natural fertilizer. The easiest way is to attach a hose to the barrel and water your plants or lawn that way. We have also had users set up microjet irrigation through a sprinkler system and a sump pump.

I would like to see people find a way to use it every time it fills up. If you just use it when it is dry, you won't use up as much of the storm water runoff. We can reverse the pollution damage a little bit at a time if we can just get people to help out.

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## Louisiana Lead Law Takes Effect



Louisiana became the fourth U.S. state to introduce new low-lead legislation for plumbing. The new law took effect Jan. 1 and mandates lead-free plumbing, though exceptions will be made for plumbing not expected to be used for human consumption. The Water Quality Assn. offers compliance testing for the new regulations.

## College Digs Educational Water Well

A grant to Rose State College in Oklahoma City by aerospace and defense company Northrop Grumman provided for the digging of a water well on the campus. The well will be used to help educate environmental science students on sustainable water use and water quality.

## City Receives Grant for Drinking Water Improvements



The U.S. Environmental Agency awarded \$388,000 to the city of Russell, Kan., population 4,506, for improvements to its drinking water system. The funds will go toward replacing deteriorating pipes to resolve leaks that cause low water pressure and potential contamination. The project is expected to be completed by fall 2012.

## Global Access to Clean Water Improving

UNICEF and the World Health Organization reported that the Millennium Development Goal of improving access to safe drinking water will likely be achieved ahead of the 2015 target date. According to the report, the proportion of the world's population with access to improved drinking water sources increased from 77% to 87% between 1990 and 2008.

## Model Studies Decreasing Groundwater Availability



The U.S. Geological Survey released a 3-D computer model study of decreasing groundwater in the Denver Basin aquifer. The study provides information on water movement within the system and how it responds to changes in climatic and human activities.

## Networking News

Joseph Guardino and Brian Lane were elected to the National Ground Water Assn.'s board of directors. Helen of Troy Ltd. acquired the PUR water purification products business from Procter & Gamble. The Pacific Water Quality Assn. (PWQA) announced the death of Bob Weisz, owner of Rayne Water Inc., in December 2011.

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