

## **Changing Behavior on Lake Ripley Using Community-based Social Marketing**

*Why is it that we all want clean and healthy lakes, but then so often fail to adopt even the smallest behavior changes that would help make it possible?* Many of us who live near lakes—especially where active management programs are in place—are bombarded with newsletters, fact sheets, press releases and special appeals that implore us to act in certain ways. These outreach efforts not only inform us about the nature of lake problems, but often provide step-by-step instructions on what we can personally do to resolve them. So what is causing the inertia? Why do we stubbornly cling to our old habits despite understanding the collective consequences... like degraded lakes, higher management costs and lower property values?

Seeking answers, the Lake Ripley Management District recently teamed up with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to design and implement a Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) project on Lake Ripley, a 418-acre lake located about 20 miles east of Madison. CBSM is an approach that grew out of research in social psychology. The emphasis is on identifying and overcoming the specific obstacles that prevent individuals from engaging in a targeted behavior that would improve the resource.

With CBSM, traditional information and education strategies are used *only* if a lack of knowledge is an important obstacle to the desired behavior change. In this way, potentially costly and ineffective community-outreach initiatives can be substituted with measures that are better targeted to resolve the root causes of inaction. CBSM methods are designed to identify the perceived barriers and benefits that drive both the current and desired behaviors. Once this is done, an array of CBSM tools can be appropriately tailored to more effectively motivate individuals to act in ways that benefit the resource. These tools include non-monetary incentives, the creation of social norms, or the development of educational materials that directly impact people's perceptions of the obstacles preventing the desired behavior.

Paul Dearlove, Lake Manager for the District, confessed: "Before being introduced to CBSM, we simply assumed we were doing everything we needed to do in terms of outreach. We had quarterly newsletters, a website, televised board meetings, guided lake and watershed tours, demonstration projects, even a well publicized landowner cost-sharing program. Unfortunately, we came to the realization that these efforts were not translating into the widespread behavior changes we were seeking, at least to the extent necessary to see measurable changes in lake quality." Dearlove first learned about CBSM at a Lake Leader's training workshop sponsored by the Wisconsin Lakes Partnership. One of the reading assignments was a book by Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith titled Fostering Sustainable Behavior – An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing.

Dearlove was later put in touch with Richard Chenoweth, a U.W.-Madison professor and environmental psychologist in the Urban and Regional Planning Department. At the time, Chenoweth taught a graduate-level course called Human Behavior and Environmental Problems. He also happened to be looking for an opportunity that would allow his class to apply CBSM theory to a real-life project. “It was clear that partnering with a lake management unit would provide a wonderful opportunity, benefiting both the Lake District and the students” said Chenoweth. Thus began a semester-long collaboration involving Dearlove, Chenoweth, 13



Back row, L-R: Rebecca Maskin, Paul Heiberger, John Molinaro, Paul Dearlove, Richard Chenoweth, Brendon Panke, Jennifer Keeley, Joan Huston; Front row, L-R: Sue Vang, Emily Sievers, Natalie Hunt, Michele Cipiti, Elizabeth Fogarty, Bridget Van Belleghem

graduate students and several advisors from U.W.-Extension. At the semester’s conclusion, CBSM programs were developed with a focus on two meaningful behaviors: building rain gardens and using zero-phosphorus lawn fertilizers. (Copies of the student reports can be downloaded from the Lake Ripley Management District’s website at [www.lakeripley.org](http://www.lakeripley.org). In addition, the EPA will be soon adding the student reports to its Nonpoint Source Outreach Toolbox at [www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/index.htm).)

While there was not enough time in a one-semester class to fully plan and implement a CBSM program, the project is continuing. Paul Heiberger, a graduate student who participated in the semester course, will be pursuing implementation of the Lake Ripley project for his master’s degree. With Chenoweth as his thesis and internship advisor, Heiberger will be working with the Lake District to implement the CBSM program designed around rain gardens. The group’s current challenge is to develop a CBSM-based questionnaire that will build on input obtained from prior focus groups. Bret Shaw, an expert in survey methods and analysis from UW-Extension, is assisting in this endeavor. The questionnaire is intended to more fully uncover landowners’ perceived obstacles related to the behavior of building rain gardens.

The program elements described in the student reports (see above) will be modified or augmented once the results of the survey are in. Program implementation will occur during the winter and into the spring and summer of 2008. So, stay tuned for future progress reports! An important part of any CBSM project is monitoring and evaluation to determine whether the program is effective, or needs to be adjusted based on initial experience. If successful, the Lake District plans to expand its CBSM efforts to include other behaviors that could significantly impact the water quality of Lake Ripley.

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