

Middletown, Maryland Gets Serious About Water Conservation

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Water conservation is often a mandatory reaction to an obvious decrease in water supplies. With planning and grant-writing assistance from the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) and funding through the Chesapeake Bay Trust, Middletown, Md., has instead taken a proactive approach to conserving the town's municipal water supplies by purchasing 90 rain barrels for its residents. The barrels were sold for \$49, half the usual cost, to Middletown residents, thanks to a \$4,410 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust. In addition, the ICPRB is collecting data from May 15 through November 30 from the barrel owners to track usage and better understand the benefits of rainwater collection on water supply.

Frederick County's Middletown Planning Region is served by groundwater wells which are diminishing. The Middletown commissioners saw rain barrels as a way to encourage residents to conserve groundwater supplies by using rainwater to keep lawns and gardens lush. The project also involved significant assistance from Middletown's local hardware store, Ingalls, as the barrel storage and pick-up site. Ingalls provided locked storage for the barrels and accepted vouchers from new barrel owners. Their partnership was vital to the project's success.

Sunny Day's Rain Bear barrels were chosen because of their superior quality. The 60-gallon barrels are reborn commercial food containers. After being used for food packaging, the barrels would have made their way to the landfill, but Bonnie Duggan, owner of Sunny Day Rainwater Management Systems, Inc., saw a second life in the barrels. The UV-resistant plastic makes the barrels ideal for withstanding scorching summer sun and the large entry holes will help capture more of the water from short, summer downpours. A screen keeps mosquitoes and debris out of the barrel and a screw-top lid keeps children and animals out and makes cleaning simple.

The barrels were available May 1 and were sold out by June 1. As part of the grant agreement, barrel owners must agree to supply weekly rain barrel data to the ICPRB through November 30. Two workshops were provided for the public about rainwater harvesting and rain barrel installation.

Plans for an expanded rain barrel project in Spring 2007 are underway. For more information about the rain barrel project, contact ICPRB's Jennifer Dotson at 301.984.1908 x 109.