

CEDAR RAPIDS, IA

CASE STUDY

Overview

The floods of 2008 continue to be one of the worst natural disasters in the past 30 years of American history. Floodwaters covered 14% of the city and displaced 10,000 residents. Although the city has made significant progress in rebuilding, a complete recovery is not expected for another decade. Cedar Rapids is the second largest city in Iowa and one of few cities in the world with governmental offices on a municipal island.



Rainwater Barrels as one runoff solution:

To educate citizens about the impact of individual actions to curb water runoff and thus improve flood conditions, in 2010 the Indian Creek Nature Center created an awareness program called ***EVERY GALLON COUNTS***. One of the first activities was to sponsor truckload rain barrel sales.

In well-watered Iowa, few people were aware of rain barrels, but the publicity generated by ***EVERY GALLON COUNTS*** struck a chord in a flood battered community. Within 3 months of promotion 600 rain barrels were purchased.

The Nature Center used the campaign to remind area residents that they can take an active role to reduce the amount of runoff from their properties by installing rain barrels, rain gardens, permeable paving and native vegetation.

“Every gallon counts. Will one rain barrel change the course of nature? Of course not. But would 100,000 barrels make a difference? Most definitely.”

- Rich Patterson, Indian Creek Nature Center Director

Implementation

Citizens soon recognized that they could utilize a diversity of techniques to allow water to percolate into the soil which could curb future floods. Grant money began to pour in for flood prevention, and funds for stormwater management practices became plentiful.





The Indian Creek Nature Center learned many lessons while running their rain barrel distribution program:

- Partner with a supplier of quality, Made in the USA rain barrels. It's especially helpful to work with a company that provides support beyond merely selling the barrels.
- Arrange comprehensive publicity through numerous media outlets. Rain barrels are easily transported, and a demo can be shown to local service organizations and garden groups.
- Have plenty of help for the distribution day. Just as importantly, make sure the barrels are helpful! Each rain barrel had information about the program, and ways to reduce stormwater runoff.
- Hold rain barrel and rain garden construction workshops.

