



Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection
**Pipe Detectives Volunteer
Program**

What Is It?

Pipe Detectives is a program where volunteers walk along designated neighborhood streams to observe and report to County officials any suspect discharges coming from stormwater pipes and channels which flow into streams. Pipe Detective volunteers essentially serve as "environmental watchdogs" by reporting any illicit violations (such as dumping of motor oil or anti-freeze) to County officials. Once trained by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), volunteers use their senses (sight and smell) to detect pollution incidents, and report their findings to County investigators. The program's goal is to actively involve County residents in preventing pollution, while invoking a sense of stewardship through heightened awareness and a hands-on process.

Are Any Special Skills Required?

NO. Training is provided by DEP in a single-day workshop. Helpful traits include a sense of environmental awareness and concern, and the ability to work within a team.

When Are Training Workshops Held, and What Is Involved?

Workshops are held once a year, usually in the Fall. Workshop notices are advertised widely throughout the County, in local newspapers, posted in libraries, and are posted on the DEP Website's [Calendar Page](#). All those who have expressed interest are contacted directly by DEP with workshop details.

During the training workshop, volunteers:

- are assigned a specific stream area within their neighborhoods; stream monitoring assignments are based upon requests made by volunteers at the time of registration; (participants are usually paired with watershed neighbors for additional fun and safety);
- learn to distinguish between pollution events and naturally occurring conditions that may appear to be pollution (e.g., iron bacteria or tannic acid from leaf decomposition);
- are provided with appropriate telephone numbers which connect them directly to a County investigator or dispatcher; (this is determined by geographic location of each team's

- watershed);
 - are provided with an indoor orientation/training session, followed by a stream walk to observe typical storm drain outfalls and flows;
 - are taught important safety procedures and provided with a comprehensive manual.
-

Age Requirements?

The Pipe Detectives Program is geared primarily for adults, but family participation is encouraged. Minors should have the supervision of an adult or other mentor/leader. High school students are eligible to receive Montgomery County Public School Community Service credits for participating (this must be coordinated in advance).

What about Time Commitment?

The more frequently you are out in the stream area, the more familiar you will become with stream flows and pipe discharges. Familiarity leads to sharper identification of normal vs. illicit discharge from a storm drain. Volunteers devise their own monitoring schedule with the following guidelines:

- optimally - monitor once a week.
- at a minimum - monitor once a month.

Some time is required to fill out data sheets for submission to the County. All volunteers are assigned a County investigator to whom they report any violations observed. NO stream 'clean-ups' are required. All interested residents are invited to join Pipe Detectives to assist the County in preventing pollution to our streams, creeks, and rivers.

For more information contact the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, Watershed Management Division, Dave Jordahl, Pipe Detectives Coordinator, 255 Rockville Pike, Suite 120, Rockville, MD 20850, telephone 240.777.7741.