

The Volunteer Monitor Newsletter: An Effective Nationwide Communication Tool

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Biographical Sketches of Authors

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Abstract

As the only national publication devoted to volunteer watershed monitoring, The Volunteer Monitor newsletter serves as an essential networking and information-sharing tool enabling people involved in volunteer monitoring to communicate with colleagues all over the country. Produced biannually for 15 years with support from U.S. EPA Office of Water, the newsletter features in-depth articles and emphasizes practical information that readers can directly apply to their own projects.

The newsletter's mission is to serve the needs of the volunteer monitoring community, a large and diverse group. EPA's online National Directory of Volunteer Environmental Monitoring Programs lists 870 programs, which involve a total of 178,000 volunteers. These programs engage in a broad spectrum of monitoring activities—chemical water quality testing, macroinvertebrate monitoring, bacteria testing, measuring Secchi transparency, habitat assessment, and more.

Typically 17,000-20,000 copies of each issue are distributed. Additional readers access the publication online via the EPA's volunteer monitoring website. The readership includes volunteer monitoring program coordinators and participants, agency staff, university professors, classroom teachers, researchers and consultants, and others.

A recent survey confirmed that the newsletter is successfully meeting the information needs of its readers. 85% of respondents reported that they had used resources they learned about through the newsletter; 72% reported using information from the newsletter in workshops, trainings, or presentations; and 66% had used the newsletter for networking. The "overall quality and usefulness" of the newsletter was rated at 9.2 out of 10.

Guiding principles that have made the newsletter effective include: clearly identifying the audience and its information needs; focusing on providing information that readers cannot obtain elsewhere; providing a mix of topics that cover the range of volunteer monitoring activities; communicating clear guidance to contributors; and a careful editing and revision process.