

# Whither Woodinville Wine Wastes?

## Pouring Wine for People, not Fish



### Introduction

The off-duty Washington State trooper called Ecology's Spills Reporting Line and described what he was seeing: a Woodinville drainage ditch full of an unknown liquid and stained a deep purple. It was a lovely shade of cab franc, perhaps, or was it petite sirah? Ecology spill responders were also intrigued—had the trooper simply visited too many wine tasting rooms earlier that day? So they headed up to Woodinville to check it out. They quickly confirmed that, indeed, the storm ditch leading to Little Bear Creek, the Sammamish River, and ultimately to Lake Washington was dark purple, yeasty-smelling...and choked with thick algal mats. Following the drainage ditch up-gradient they quickly located the source of the

pungent purple punch: four local wineries were washing out barrels and dumping the wastes—juice, stems, seeds, skins, yeast—down the storm drain in the parking lot. In each case, the “dumper” stated that “everyone around here does it” and that “the city said it was okay to empty barrels down the drain.” The spill responders then headed down the ditch line to Little Bear Creek where they found the same unusual algae growing at the stormwater outfall.

### Problem

The Ecology Spills Team cited four businesses for illegal dumping and turned the file over to the Water Quality Program for further action. The Water Quality Program identified a number of concerns, including:

- (1) Winery waste discharge was clearly (and negatively) affecting water quality in Little Bear Creek, a salmon-bearing stream known to have low dissolved oxygen.
- (2) At least four wineries had not followed good waste disposal practices.
- (3) They were likely *not* the only ones dumping their wastes down the storm drain—Woodinville has 50+ wineries.
- (4) This wasn't a new occurrence—the algal mats were thick and well-established.
- (5) The city needed to clarify its message to the wineries and provide strong oversight of this growing industry.

### Project goals

To tackle Ecology's water quality concerns, an Ecology Municipal Stormwater Specialist met with Woodinville's Public Works Director the following week. They discussed the city's Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit requirements to publicize a spill reporting hotline; prohibit non-stormwater discharges to the storm drain; maintain and operate the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4); and educate residents and businesses on how illicit discharges affect surface waters like Little Bear Creek. The city acted quickly to review its ordinance prohibiting non-stormwater discharges to the MS4; send a letter to all Woodinville wineries reminding them that it is illegal to dump winery wastes down the storm drain; speed up efforts to establish the city's spills hotline; and clean the storm drain system below the office park where these wineries are located.

Meanwhile, Ecology staff reached out to King County Industrial Wastewater staff and asked them to work with the wineries to help them connect to the sanitary sewer (for disposing of liquid wastes) and to dispose of their solid wastes in an environmentally responsible manner. Ecology also contacted the Woodinville Wine Association to set up a meeting with local winery owners/operators to discuss available disposal, permit, and compliance options and contacted the office park owner, who quickly agreed to clean out the office park catch basins.



## Milestones and outcomes

Ecology's Northwest Region Water Quality Program staff organized a joint Woodinville-King County-Ecology presentation to the Woodinville Wine Association. The presentation was designed as a one-stop event for wineries to learn about: (1) fate and impact of wastes dumped down storm drains (they lower oxygen levels in Little Bear Creek or the Sammamish River); (2) preferred options for safely disposing of winery wastes (i.e., discharge to the sanitary sewer and compost solids); (3) local permits/approvals needed to connect to the sanitary sewer; and (4) consequences of future illicit discharges (e.g., local and state penalties or fines). Ecology also left a two-page summary with the winery owners and their newsletter editor for distribution to winery representatives who missed the presentation.



*Little Bear Creek, above the outfall pipe draining the wineries*

It is too early to say yet whether all Woodinville wineries will connect to the sanitary sewer and properly dispose of their wastes, or whether some will occasionally dump barrel dregs down the storm drain. We can say, however, that the winemakers now have all the information they need to responsibly dispose of their wastes; the ditch no longer smells like a brewery; the fish in Little Bear Creek aren't drunk; and the city is progressing toward implementing its Phase II Municipal Stormwater Permit requirements.

## Project highlights

The successful outcome of the Woodinville wine caper is first due to a highly successful collaboration between Ecology's Spills and Water Quality Programs. Before this incident, Spill responders were not very familiar with the Municipal Stormwater Permit. They now have a stronger understanding of the resources the Water Quality Program brings to spill response and are aware of the role local governments can play in preventing and responding to spills that reach the storm system. Second, the situation created a series of "teachable moments" and occasions to partner with a new Ecology permit holder (Woodinville) and a long-time colleague (King County Industrial Wastewater). Finally, it created an opportunity for Ecology's Bellevue office to reach out to a small but growing industry in our region and to prevent significant future environmental degradation to an important local stream system.

## Partners

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## Funding

This "project" received no special funding. We folded the work into our regular responsibilities.

## For more information

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