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## Let it rain: We're rolling out the barrels

When I moved to Indianapolis in August, two things struck me immediately: the flatness of the land and the amount of water that collected in the streets every time it rained. Every corner seemed to have a puddle, even after just a little storm.

Now that I've been here four months, I realize Indy is all about much more than that, but my background in ecological design and storm management resulted in a potentially unique (OK, dorky) perspective on the new city.

Clearly, we can't do anything about the topography. We can, however, deal with the water.

United Water recently presented the Butler University Center for Urban Ecology, where I am director, a grant of nearly \$20,000 for a project that we hope will be a catalyst for a citywide initiative to take the pressure off our sewer system -- and the water off our roads.

As part of the project, we will purchase and install 20 rain barrels and cisterns at six locations around the city to collect water. We will test the water for purity, use it for irrigating our growing landscape and, if it's clean, water our edible gardens.

The rain barrels and cisterns will be installed in the first half of 2010. Beginning in June, biweekly water-quality sampling will begin, and in the final four months of 2010, the water analysis will be completed.

Our installations will take place at the Green Broad Ripple Community Garden (two rain barrels), the Rocky Ripple Community Garden (two rain barrels), Butler's University Terrace Apartments (one 525-gallon cistern), the Shortridge Magnet High School for Law and Public Policy (three rain barrels), the Harrison Center for the Arts (four rain barrels) and the Indianapolis Project School (one 550-gallon cistern).

Butler students also will use the sites to develop what we're calling a micro-green infrastructure map. This will be an interactive map that will allow citizens to identify locations around the city where they installed their own rain barrels using the Web or applications on their mobile devices (think iPhone).

A few rain barrels may make little difference for the storm drain system, but a widespread rain barrel and cistern network in Indianapolis would significantly alleviate the current strain on the city's combined sewer system.

This project helps to formalize much of the ongoing work in the city relating to rain barrel construction and installation. Just think, if we installed 30,000 rain barrels around the city, each collecting 55 gallons during rain storms, we could keep over 1.6 million gallons of water out of the city's sewers and help prevent combined sewer overflows that harm our city's rivers and streams.

That's also 1.6 million fewer gallons that need to be sucked out of the White River through the Central

Canal and treated by the water company.

The result from using green infrastructure like this would be across-the-board savings -- for individuals through lower water usage (the content of rain barrels is perfect for watering lawns) and for the city in reduction on the strain of our overused sewer and water-treatment systems.

If everything goes as I suspect it will, the Rain Barrel Project will be just the beginning. After all, it's not a given that the streets have to flood when it rains.

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