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Student winners announced in stormwater design contest

Patti Richards, News Office
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Gweneth Newman and Katherine Anderson, two students from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, won the MIT/Environmental Protection Agency Design Competition to develop stormwater management plans that would improve the water quality of the Charles River. The awards were announced at a ceremony at the MIT Faculty Club last night.

The pair's winning design focuses on an innovative way to slowly release stormwater into the ground, thus minimizing the transport of contaminants to the Charles River.

"The MIT/EPA Stormwater Design Competition represents an example of an innovative partnership between MIT and the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] working together to address a societal problem in the best traditions of both organizations," commented Paul Parravano, co-director of MIT's Office of Government and Community Relations.

The competition is part of the EPA's initiative to make the Charles River "fishable and swimmable" by 2005. Initially announced in 1995, the initiative relies on the commitment of numerous federal, state and local agencies as well as the involvement of citizens, nonprofit groups, businesses and private institutions.

Even though the condition of the Charles has continually improved since the initiative's inception, garnering a recent grade of "B" over the "D" it received five years ago, the river continues to suffer from pollution, particularly during and after rainstorms.

Stormwater, which washes bacterial contaminants, oil, grease and metals from automobiles, pets, wildlife and other sources into the river through storm drain systems, remains a major impediment to restoring the health of the Charles.

"Stormwater is one of the hardest environmental issues to crack because it is not a simple engineering problem," said William Walsh-Rogalski, a lawyer who leads the EPA's Clean Charles Initiative. "It's about changing people's behavior, both in the way they manage water at the residential level and how they maintain clean city streets."

The MIT/EPA Design Competition was announced in April 2001. The contestants focused on solutions that local residents could easily implement, using as a model site a residential plot in the Cambridgeport neighborhood that typifies thousands of locations throughout the Charles River watershed.

Organizers hope the competition will increase awareness of a key environmental issue on which the public rarely focuses. "It's time to turn our attention to stormwater runoff and the challenge of getting every home owner, car owner, dog owner and small-business owner to play an

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individual role in reducing the flow of contaminants into the river," said Walsh-Rogalski.

Newman and Anderson won the \$5,000 grand prize for their efforts. MIT has also agreed to pay up to \$10,000 to fund implementation of their winning proposal at a model site. Two first-prize awards of \$1,500 each (one for students and the other for professionals) also were presented. Comprehensive Environmental, Inc., a consulting firm based in Merrimack, N.H., won in the professional category, while three Cornell graduate students (Theodore Eisenman, William Sprengnether and Jamie Vanucchi) took the student award.

The Cambridge City Council presented MIT with a resolution at the awards ceremony recognizing the outstanding ideas of the winning entries and thanking MIT for establishing the contest.

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