

## **FOSC Outfall Monitoring Blog – Maple Ave Detergent Detective**

### FOSC Outfall Monitoring Team Seeks to Solve Suds

Many Sligo Creek-area residents have probably seen a trickle of bubbles floating down the Creek from time to time. But in the course of our outfall monitoring, we've often come across robust suds flows –



as well as one or two of truly unfortunate proportions.



Some of the bubbles we see in Sligo Creek and its tributaries are from organic sources, including the breakdown of leaves and other summer greenery during the course of the fall and winter. These films are typically broken down by bacteria after a few days and their nutrients are gradually recycled back into the ecosystem. But other suds are from manufactured detergents. These unwelcome bubbles can make their way into the Creek and other surface waters through a variety of avenues: driveway or curbside car

washing, leaky or misconnected home, apartment or municipal sewage pipes, and soaps, detergents or solvents allowed to flow into gutters and storm drains.

Soap suds are fine in a sink or a washing machine or at a car wash, but they don't belong in a stream. Detergents can introduce excess nitrates and phosphates into the stream, upsetting the nutrient balance and triggering algal blooms. Detergents can also break down the mucous layer that helps protect fish from harmful bacteria, and because detergents decrease surface tension in the water, they make it easier for fish and other aquatic animals to take up potentially harmful chemicals from the stream.

During the course of our FOSC outfall monitoring, the Maple Avenue outfall has been the site of chronic, consistent detergents flows. So consistent, in fact, that a large slug of suds can usually be relied upon to slide into the Creek between 10:30 AM and 11:15 AM during each monitoring session. While the County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has used dye testing in an effort to track down the source or sources of the illicit discharge, thus far, it remains a mystery.

Enter Lori A. Lilly, formerly of the Center for Watershed Protection and now a freelance Environmental Restoration Specialist. In an effort to get a better handle on the Maple Avenue Suds Mystery, she stopped by the outfall last week to set up a time lapse camera nearby.



She hopes that by monitoring the outfall 24/7 for a week or two, we will have a better sense of which outfall pipe is the main source of the suds, and what time(s) of day the detergents are released.



Armed with this data, we will work with the County DEP and the City of Takoma Park to determine the source of these discharges and then have the responsible party make the repairs necessary to end them. After we head out to the field again and retrieve the data, I will pass on our findings as soon as they are ready. While you're out enjoying Sligo Creek, if you happen to notice suds or other discharges near Maple Avenue or anywhere along the Creek's channel or its tributaries, please text or email the information to FOSC's Water WatchDog program at [ReportSligoPollution@fosc.org](mailto:ReportSligoPollution@fosc.org). These reports are automatically routed to FOSC and to the County's DEP, and they are a great help in our efforts to help restore this waterway.