



Why be Concerned?

Too often, we think of ourselves as external to our environment. We ignore the many relationships among people, other living creatures and our surroundings. We ignore these relationships at our own risk. Solutions to environmental problems are far more effective when all life forms are considered part of the ecosystem.



Nonpoint Source Water Pollution

What is it?

Nonpoint source water pollution (NPS) is water pollution that does not come out of the end of a pipe. NPS pollution occurs when rainfall or irrigation water runs over lands or through the ground, picks up pollutants and deposits them into bayous, rivers, lakes and coastal waters or introduces them into ground water.

Water is one of the most remarkable compounds in nature. Water absorbs more substances than any other liquid. It is this property that sustains the process of erosion and sedimentation—the constant washing and sweeping away of minerals, salts, chemicals, sand, silt and soil from the land into our waterways.

Imagine the path taken by a drop of rain from the time it hits the ground to when it reaches a bayou, river, coastal waters or ground water. Any pollutant it picks up on its journey can become part of the NPS problem. Rain that cannot be absorbed into the soil becomes runoff and carries contaminants and toxic substances into water bodies. Rain also carries pollutants from the air such as automobile and industrial exhaust.

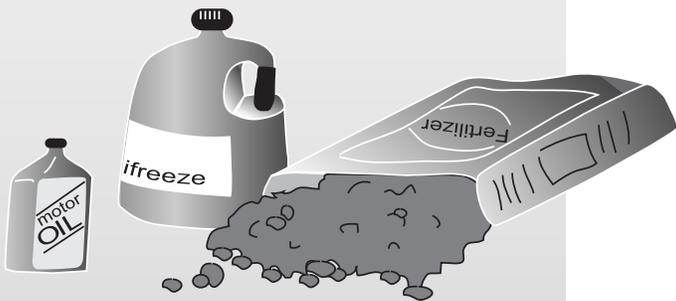
The most common NPS pollutants are sediment and nutrients. These wash into water bodies from our homes, construction sites and other areas of disturbance. Other common NPS pollutants include pesticides, litter, bacteria, oil, grease, fertilizers, cleaning supplies, toxic chemicals and heavy metals. Destroyed habitat, unsafe drinking water, beach closures, fish kills and other environmental and human health problems can result from NPS pollutants. Some of the pollutants can also ruin the beauty of healthy, clean water habitats. Each year millions of tax dollars are spent to restore and protect the areas damaged by NPS pollutants.

We are an integral part of this process. Every time we wash our hands, clean our drains or water our lawns, we can become part of the problem. Continuous accumulation of chemicals and toxic products from home use can find their way into our waterways. This can ultimately threaten fish and shellfish and hinder our enjoyment from swimming, fishing and recreation. Fertilizers can deprive bayous and rivers of the oxygen needed to support life. Our homes are indeed pathways to our waterways.

What is Nonpoint Source Pollution?

Questions

What is nonpoint source pollution?



What are the effects of these pollutants on our waters?

What causes nonpoint source pollution?

Answers

- Nonpoint source pollution, unlike pollution from industrial and sewage treatment plants, comes from many diffuse sources. NPS pollution is caused by rainfall moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and human-made pollutants, finally depositing them into lakes, rivers, wetlands, coastal waters and even our underground sources of drinking water.

These pollutants include:

- Excess fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides from residential areas
- Oil, grease and toxic chemicals from urban runoff
- Sediment from improperly managed construction sites, crop and forest lands, and eroding streambanks
- Bacteria and nutrients from livestock, pet wastes and faulty septic systems

Atmospheric deposition and hydromodification also are sources of nonpoint source pollution.

- States report that nonpoint source pollution is the leading remaining cause of water quality problems. The effects of nonpoint source pollutants on specific waters vary and may not always be fully assessed. We know, however, that these pollutants have harmful effects on drinking water supplies, recreation, fisheries and wildlife.
- We all play a part. Nonpoint source pollution results from a wide variety of human activities on the land. Each of us can contribute to the problem without even realizing it.

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