

Water Pollution Facts At-A-Glance

Today's #1 Source of Water Pollution: Residents

Twenty six years ago, the Clean Water Act was passed to establish a legal framework for the restoration of the nation's waters by setting standards for the protection of wildlife, recreation and drinking water sources. The primary target of this legislation was industry--the largest polluter of the early 1970s. And the Clean Water Act has been an immense success in that regard; businesses have made significant strides in reducing the amount of pollutants they release into waterways.

Now, however, a new focus in the fight against water pollution has emerged: changing the everyday actions of individuals.

Studies show that the cumulative impact of such everyday activities as driving, yard work and home improvement activities are the number one source of water pollution in the Bay Area. Today, it's the home gardener and driving commuter who are doing the most damage to local waterways.

How Pollutants Get To The Water: 2 Ways

- Storm drains
 - Any toxic materials that are washed off of the ground and into gutters and storm drains enter local waterways untreated in most parts of the Bay Area.

 - This is called stormwater runoff pollution because the only thing that should be flowing into storm drains is clean rain water!

- Home drains
 - In most places in the Bay Area, when you pour a toxic product (such as leftover pesticides or oven cleaner) down an inside drain in your home, it can flow untreated to local waterways.

 - Wastewater treatment plants were designed to treat human wastes using biological processes. Toxic wastes are difficult to treat and often pass untreated into Bay Area waters.

 - When toxic products are poured down inside drains, it's called wastewater pollution (wastewater is the water that flows from home drains).

What Actions Cause Water Pollution?

On the Road

- Driving a leaky car contributes to water pollution because oil can be washed off of streets and into storm drains, harming fish and wildlife.

- It doesn't take a lot of oil to cause water pollution: Just one quart of oil can contaminate up to 250,000 gallons of water.

- A car that isn't tuned properly produces 10-15 times more pollution than a well-running vehicle.

In the Yard

- Rain and over-watering wash chemicals off lawns and yards into storm drains. This is also true when the perimeter of your home is sprayed for pests, such as ants.

- Leftover garden and yard chemicals can pollute creeks, the Bay and Delta when poured or rinsed down household drains.

At Home

- Toxic household products such as paints, yard chemicals, and certain cleaning products should never be poured down indoor sanitary drains (such as sinks, toilets) or allowed to enter a street, gutter, or storm drain.

What You Can Do

- Avoid using toxic products. Look for less-toxic alternatives. Call 1-888-BAYWISE for more information.

- If you must use pesticides, buy "ready-to-use" instead of concentrates; use sparingly.

- Clean and rinse all equipment over your lawn or garden; never on paved surfaces or down a drain inside your home.

- Properly dispose of any leftover pesticide at your local household hazardous waste collection facility. Never pour leftover pesticides down inside drains or into street gutters!

- Use a broom or rake instead of a hose to clean up lawn and yard clippings.

- Maintain your car regularly to keep it in tune and free of leaks.

- Fix car leaks immediately.

- Recycle and/or dispose of oil and other automotive fluids properly.

- Dispose of any toxic products--such as oven cleaner, drain cleaner, used motor oil, oil paints or pesticides--at your local household hazardous waste collection facility.