

## Questions & Answers



**Q:** Why do our lakes, streams, and ocean water turn red with mud after a heavy rain?

**A:** Largely because of a type of pollution called "nonpoint source pollution." Since the early 1970s, federal and state governments have focused on controlling discharges from sewage treatment and industrial plants. Now that we've made progress in controlling these sources, we are concentrating on the serious water quality problems associated with nonpoint source pollution.

**Q:** What is nonpoint source pollution?

**A:** Unlike pollution from industrial and sewage treatment plants, nonpoint source pollution comes from many diffuse sources. Nonpoint source pollution is caused by rainfall moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and man-made pollutants, finally depositing them into our streams, wetlands, coastal waters, and even our underground sources of drinking water. These pollutants include:

- excess fertilizers and pesticides from fields and gardens;
- oil, grease, and toxic chemicals from urban and industrial areas;
- sediment from construction sites, crop and forest lands, and eroding stream banks; and
- bacteria and nutrients from livestock, pet waste, and faulty septic systems and cesspools.

**Q:** What are the effects of these pollutants?

**A:** We know that these pollutants may have harmful effects on drinking water supplies, recreation, fisheries, and wildlife.

**Q:** What causes nonpoint source pollution?

**A:** We all play a part. Each of us can contribute to the problem without even realizing it.

**Q:** What can we do about nonpoint source pollution?

**A:** We can all work together to reduce and prevent nonpoint source pollution. The federal government is responsible for managing federal lands to control soil erosion. The state government has developed legislation governing groundwater protection and water quality standards. The counties administer zoning and grading ordinances. Each individual can play an important role by practicing conservation and by changing everyday habits.

## What You Can Do . . .



### Urban Stormwater Runoff

- Keep trash, pet waste, leaves, and debris out of street gutters and storm drains. These flow directly to streams and the ocean.
- Apply lawn and garden chemicals sparingly
- Dispose of used oil, paints, and other household chemicals properly, not in storm drains or down the sink. Call the Department of Health for disposal information.
- Do not hose spilled brake fluid, oil, and grease into the street where they can eventually enter storm drains. Apply absorbent clay-based kitty litter or newspaper to spill, then dispose in a trash bag.
- Control soil erosion on your property by planting ground cover.

### Agriculture

- Minimize use of fertilizers and pesticides.
- Reduce soil erosion with ground covers, residues, contour planting, and other practices.
- Use rotational grazing systems on pasture and rangeland.
- Dispose of pesticides, containers, and tank rinse in accordance with the pesticide label.

### Forest Land Management

- Prevent forest fires. Fires destroy vegetation causing erosion, flooding, and the introduction of weedy plants.
- Do not release pets into the wild. They will degrade watershed quality.
- Obtain proper permits for harvesting forest vegetation.

*For more information, please contact:*

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# NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION



