

What is the problem?

Water pollution comes from many sources. Since it is not possible to have pollution inspectors on every corner 24 hours a day, citizen reporting of pollution problems is important to protecting local water quality.

How can citizens help?

Your observations help federal, state, and local officials know when and where pollution events are happening. By taking good notes and perhaps a picture or two, you can help local authorities respond to pollution when it is occurring.

How will your information be used?

Your information alerts local authorities so they can perform an investigation. Their first goal will be to stop an ongoing pollution event. In most cases, agencies provide technical assistance and warnings first if a person or business is responsible for the problem. Their response will typically consider:

- ◆ History of the violator.
- ◆ Impact on the environment.
- ◆ Was the violation done knowingly?

Local authorities cannot promise that resources will be available to respond to all calls. When there are not enough inspectors to go around, your information will help them prioritize their investigations.

Mysterious...but not dangerous!

Sometimes natural conditions look like serious pollution problems. Examples include:

- ◆ **Iron oxide discharges.** When oxygen poor, iron rich water surfaces, the iron becomes oxidized and much or all of a stream can turn orange in color. Chemical interactions with plants and other parts of the stream may cause iron to precipitate on aquatic plants or sometimes cover the entire streambed.
- ◆ **Foaming.** It is normal for some small creeks to have a small amount of foam. The foam is caused by nutrients and proteins and is not a pollution indicator. If you see handfuls of suds, it is probably not due to this natural cause.
- ◆ **Tannins and lignins.** These natural compounds are derived from leaves and other organic materials and turn water a deep brown tea-like color. Some healthy water bodies have this color due to the presence of deciduous leafy material or a peat bog upstream.

Snohomish County's website has pictures and more information on common pollution problems.

www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/Public Works/Divisions/SWM/Work Areas/Water Quality/Investigations/default.htm

Where we need your help

Typical problems you can identify and report for further investigation include:

- ◆ **Emergency situations.** A sudden threat to human health or the environment is an environmental emergency. Examples include a spill of raw sewage or a chemical spill. Because hazardous gases and other serious threats may be present, **do not** attempt to document an environmental emergency. Immediately report the location to local authorities.
- ◆ **Erosion.** Soil erosion clogs streams and suffocates fish. If you see brown, sediment-laden water leaving a construction site and entering a ditch or stream, please report it.
- ◆ **Manure problems.** If you observe manure being sprayed during winter months or overspray onto roadways or into local streams or ditches, report this. Manure should not be stored near streams or ditches. If you see cattle, horses, or other livestock in a stream, report it.
- ◆ **Oil or other spills.** Oil and other chemical spills can be hazardous for both people and fish. Be very careful in approaching these pollutants to protect your personal health. Only trained responders from the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) and local fire departments should approach these types of pollutants.

The basics on reporting

Use the following good practices to report a potential pollution problem. Your information will be helpful to the follow-up investigator.

Take good notes

A good set of notes will provide a complete and accurate set of facts for others. Use the following as a checklist when reporting a suspicious event:

- ◆ Location of observation.
- ◆ Time/date of your observation.
Does it occur at a certain time?
(for example, every day at 6 a.m.?)
- ◆ Could you determine the source?
- ◆ How did the water look?
- ◆ Did you observe any dead fish?
- ◆ Are there any odors?
- ◆ Were there other witnesses?

Take photographs

Photographic evidence can be valuable in establishing the presence of pollution, especially where erosion problems exist. When taking photographs, remember to record the time, date, and location you took the photo. Wherever possible, try to include an established landmark so the location of the pollution problem cannot be challenged. Digital photos are helpful to investigators in understanding the location and severity of certain discharges

About taking samples

Because of the potential for personal injury from contact with dangerous chemicals or entry into unsafe environments, please allow local authorities or trained responders to collect samples.

Things to watch out for!

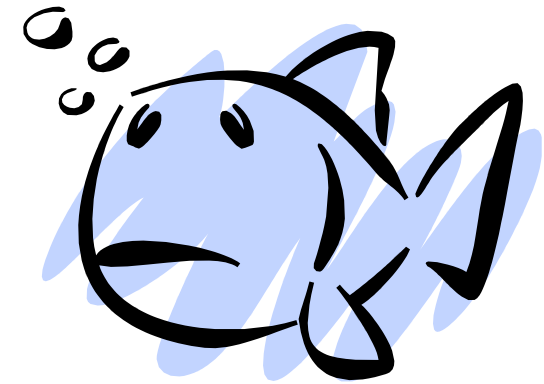
- ◆ Be careful, safety first, do not attempt anything dangerous.
- ◆ Do not sample unknown liquids.
- ◆ Do not trespass on private property.

Contact list

The following is a list of contacts to report potential pollution problems. We recommend that you contact Ecology's Environmental Tracking System (ERTS) desk first.

- ◆ Emergencies: Call 911
- ◆ Ecology ERTS desk Bellevue: 425-649-7000 (This is a 24-hr number.)
- ◆ Snohomish County Water Pollution Hotline: 425-388-6481
- ◆ City of Marysville Surface Water Program, 360-363-8100
- ◆ City of Arlington, main switchboard number 360-403-3421

Reporting Water Quality Problems



A Citizen's Guide



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