

How to spot and report pollution

A GUIDE TO SAFEGUARDING LOCAL
WATERS AND COMMUNITY HEALTH



RE SOURCES

**NORTH SOUND
WATERKEEPER®**

Table of contents

A letter from RE Sources' Waterkeeper	1
County pollution hotlines	2
How to report pollution	3
How to report illness	4
How to report sick, injured, stranded, or dead marine animals	5

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON LAND

In neighborhoods & urban areas	6
Storm drains	7
Restaurants	8
Agricultural sites	9
Construction sites	10
Railroads & industrial activity	11

POLLUTION IN OR NEAR WATER

Discharge & drainage pipes	12
Near marinas, boatyards, shipyards, ponds, creeks & wetlands	13
Foam	14
Algal blooms	15
Oil sheens	16

You can find a downloadable version of this booklet on RE Sources' website, along with additional helpful links and references!



Photo: Hannah Gabrielson

Not exactly sure what pollution looks like? No problem! This guide outlines how to recognize and report pollution anywhere. A drop of gasoline, a plastic bag, a pile of exposed dirt, or even a few soap bubbles may not seem particularly harmful, but these pollutants can find their way to our creeks, rivers, and oceans and accumulate over time. Most contaminants found in the oceans originated on land. Now, endangered resident orcas are so overloaded with toxic chemicals they are struggling to survive.

Finding pollution can be strategic or accidental; it just takes an observant and curious person to recognize and detect pollution. You might spot pollution while you're out walking your dog, or you may choose to actively search out pollution by visiting known construction sites or strategic shorelines. Searching for pollution after a storm event can be particularly fruitful. You may spot pollution in a car, on foot, or even by boat. Pollution in water can make people and pets sick, if you feel that you or a loved one have gotten sick from recreating in water it is important to report it, see page 4 to learn how.

Regardless of your mission or mode of transportation, **there are a few things to consider:**

- **Your personal safety is more important than pollution.**
- Waterways are public property, but shorelines (including beaches) may be private. **Don't trespass on private property.**

Thank you for taking initiative to keep pollution out of your local waters — and the whole Salish Sea.

Sincerely,
Kirsten McDade, North Sound Waterkeeper at RE Sources

Funded in part by a Public Participation Grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology.

WHO TO CONTACT IF THE POLLUTION APPEARS SERIOUS:

For oil spills:

National Response Center: (800) 424-8802

WA Emergency Management Division: (800) OILS-911

For other pollutants:

Ecology Northwest Regional Office: (206) 594-0000

(King to Whatcom, Kitsap to San Juan)

Ecology Southwest Regional Office: (360) 407-6300

(Pierce to Clark, Olympia to Olympic Peninsula)

County pollution hotlines:

WHATCOM
(360) 778-6000

SAN JUAN
(360) 370-0500

SKAGIT
(360) 336-9400

ISLAND
(360) 679-7331

CLALLAM
(206) 477-4811

SNOHOMISH
(425) 388-6481

JEFFERSON
(360) 385-9160

KITSAP
(360) 337-5777

KING
(206) 477-4811

THURSTON
(360) 867-2099

PIERCE
(253) 798-4274

How to report pollution

When in Whatcom County, call or text RE Sources' Pollution Hotline:

(360) 220-0556

Our staff monitor the Hotline Monday-Friday during business hours.
You can also email Kirsten McDade, North Sound Waterkeeper, at kirstenm@re-sources.org.

Take photos of the pollution! When in doubt, report it!

Report an incident online to Ecology:

<https://ecology.wa.gov/ERTS>



Other resources by location:

STATEWIDE Hazardous Materials Spills: 911

Derelict Fishing Debris: (800) 477-6224

Navigation Hazards (USCG Puget Sound): (206) 217-6200

Algal Bloom: www.nwtoxicalgae.org/ReportBloom.aspx

Statewide Derelict Vessel Reporting: (360) 902-2628

WHATCOM

Bellingham's Stormwater Hotline: (360) 778-7979

Port of Bellingham Marinas (includes Blaine): (360) 676-2500

Whatcom Health Dept. Litter Reporting: (360) 778-6000

SKAGIT

Skagit County Public Works, Pollution Hotline: (360) 336-9400

Anacortes Maintenance and Operations Div.: (360) 293-1921

Burlington's Public Works: (360) 755-9715

Mt. Vernon's Water Quality Hotline: (360) 336-6204

Port of Anacortes Marina: (360) 293-0694

How to report illness

Report any illnesses associated with recreating in a waterway. If you or your pet have gotten sick after swimming in water, contact your local health agency. Symptoms may include: a rash, a skin or ear infection, gastrointestinal illness such as stomach cramps, diarrhea or vomiting.

In Whatcom County, you can report an "Illness from Water Recreation" on the health agency's website.

1. I am completing this form to...

- ☐ Ask a question.
☒ File a complaint.

2. Choose a category that best fits your question or concern.*

- ✓ -- Select One --
Complaint -- Drinking Water
Complaint -- Algae Bloom
Complaint -- Bats
Complaint -- Garbage/Illegal Dumping
Complaint -- Illegal Installation of Sewage System
Complaint -- Illness from Food
Complaint -- Illness from Water Recreation
Complaint -- Unsanitary Food Establishment



Safe Seafood Harvesting

It is generally not safe to consume seafood from urban waterways because they are likely contaminated with legacy pollutants as well as chronic storm-water pollution. Marine life, such as crabs, seaweed, oysters, mussels, and clams, that live and dwell in urban waters absorb and harbor contaminants that can be hazardous to your health if consumed.



WILDLIFE REPORTING

If you witness a sick, injured, stranded, or dead marine mammal or sea turtle, immediately contact the nearest marine mammal stranding network. By reporting the animal, you ensure that professional responders and scientists can take action.

Marine Mammal Stranding Networks:

West Coast Marine Mammal Stranding Network: (866) 767-6114

NOAA Fisheries Enforcement Hotline: (800) 853-1964

Whatcom County Marine Mammal Stranding Network: (360) 966-8845

In addition, you can report strandings or fish and wildlife offenses to the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Offenses include fishing or hunting out of season, illegal blocking of streams or rivers, improper use of equipment near or in water without a permit, endangered species violations and poaching, firearms violations, and illegal sale or purchase of fish or game products.

Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife

Phone: (360) 902 - 2200

Non-emergency: (877) 933 - 9847

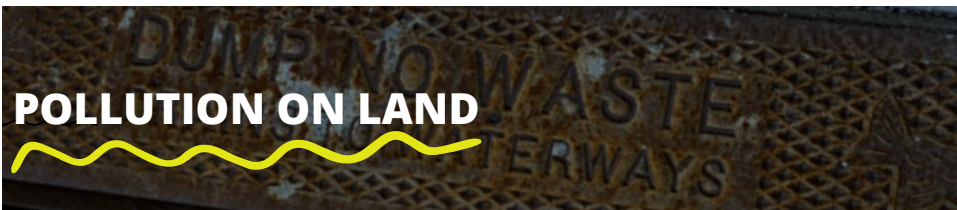
Email: reportpoaching@dfw.wa.gov

If you witness a sick coho salmon, file an Environmental Report Systems Tracking (ERTS) report with the Washington State Department of Ecology: <https://ecology.wa.gov/ERTS> (QR code on page 2).

Signs that a salmon might be sick with URMS:

- Disorientation
- Surface swimming
- Gaping at the mouth
- Dying before spawning

Polluted road runoff containing a toxic chemical from tires (6PPD-quinone) causes Urban Runoff Mortality Syndrome (URMS). By reporting sick coho, you ensure that the state documents the pollution event, putting pressure on the state to act to prevent future incidents.



The pollutants that originate on land can be easily washed into our creeks, streams, and the ocean after rain events. Keeping our land clean and free of pollutants is the best way to keep our stormwater clean.

Storm drains discharge directly into the Salish Sea, and some of them even flow into salmon-bearing streams like Whatcom Creek.

In neighborhoods & urban areas

- Trash and illegal debris piles on land or on beaches
- Dumping grass or other yard waste on public property or right of ways
- Dog poop—not just any time, but if you notice a pattern in a particular area, document and report
- People feeding geese and ducks—again, not just any time, but if you notice a pattern in a particular area, document and report
- Leaky cars—oil and grease
- Fertilizers should only be applied when plants are growing and it's not raining. Consider using organic fertilizers, or none at all!



Over-fertilizing can lead to polluted runoff



Treated wood can create an oil sheen



Storm drains

Nothing but water should be entering a storm drain! Especially after rainfall, watch for...

- Clogged storm drains—unclog it yourself if it's safe to do so! Report if unsafe or if there's a pattern of clogging in a particular area
- Wastewater from car washing, pressure washing, cleaning, paint chipping, hazardous materials, or over-watering
- Over-application of fertilizers
- Failing septic systems
- Erosion of dirt into storm drain or water body

TIP: Clear any debris if it's safe to do so!



POLLUTION ON LAND

Restaurants

Restaurants on the waterfront or near storm drains can be a pollutant source. **What to watch for...**

- Greasy discharges from dumpsters, oil drums, or buckets
- Potential plumbing leaks
- Direct dumping of food waste or other products
- Wet, sticky, or smelly residue or debris



Don't wash cars where soap goes down storm drains!



POLLUTION ON LAND

Agricultural sites

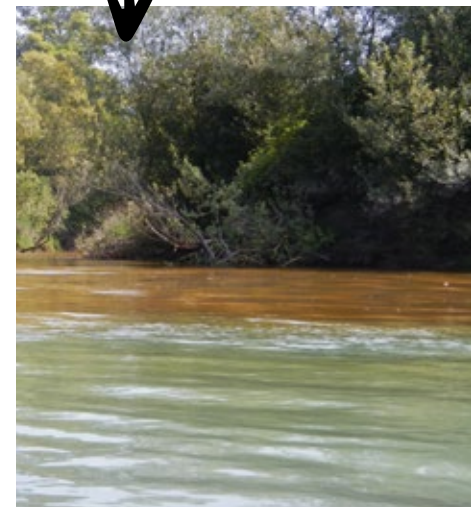
Fecal coliform bacteria from warm-blooded animals (mostly livestock) and nutrients (from manure and fertilizers) are the two biggest pollutants of concern in agricultural areas. **They enter the water directly or during rain events. These can kill fish. Watch for...**

- Animals in or very near water
- Draining or leaking of manure ponds
- Manure spreading during winter months and when it's rainy or stormy
- Over-application of fertilizers
- Excess sediment in ditches

REMEMBER: Don't trespass and avoid any confrontation. Stay safe!



Stark water color difference





Construction sites

Construction sites can result in the discharge of turbid (muddy) water from digging and exposing earth to rainwater, as well as releasing petroleum products and excess nutrients.

What to watch for near work and construction sites...

- Sediment control mechanisms should be in place and functioning such as silt fences, hay bales, plastic covering, mulching, matting, or seeding
- Storm drains should be protected from runoff
- Entrance and exit sites should be stabilized with rock or gravel
- Vehicles leaving the site should not track soil
- Armoring and dredging
- Oil sheens



No sediment control can lead to a clogged drain

This poorly-maintained sediment control is now a pollution source



Railroads & industrial activity

Trains travel up and down the coastline multiple times a day and are dangerously close to critical habitat. **Watch for any type of debris coming from the tracks and/or the trains themselves:**

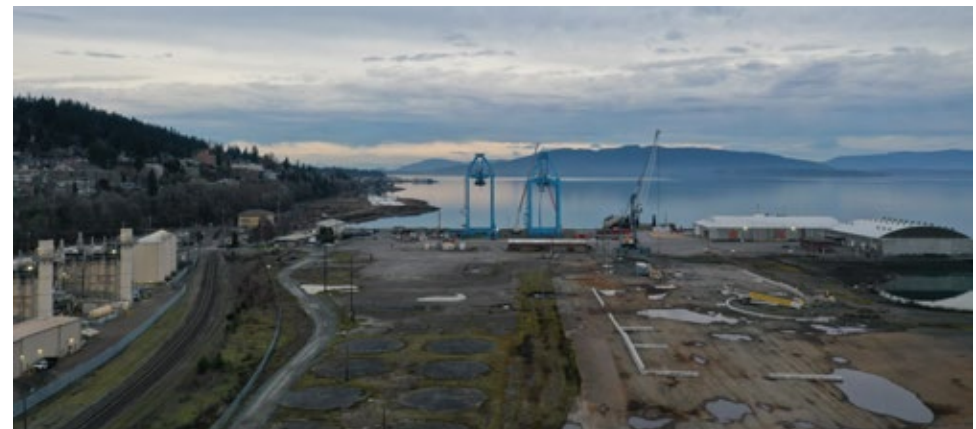
- Oily machinery
- Excess dust
- Sheens from treated wood
- Coal pieces

Treated wood near railroads can leave a sheen in water



Urban waterfronts hold a variety of industries that have the potential to contribute pollution. **Watch for...**

- Any non-clear discharge going down a drain
- Oil sheens
- Sediment or dust



WATER POLLUTION

Discharge & drainage pipes

Discharges from the end of a pipe can be from a range of municipal and/or industrial sources, and can be treated or untreated. Some pipes are designed for multiple uses, such as those used to discharge stormwater and, when necessary, combined sewer overflows. **What to watch for around discharge pipes...**

- Turbid (muddy) and discolored discharge from pipe
- Very odorous discharge
- Gushing discharge during dry weather
- Debris accumulated on shore or in the water
- Erosion around the pipe
- Broken or exposed pipe



Broken pipes often lead to more pollution, erosion, and flooding



All the signs: cloudy, discolored, foamy—and probably stinky

WATER POLLUTION

Near marinas, boatyards, shipyards, ponds, creeks & wetlands

No waste material should be discharged into waterways. Pressure washing waste, fuel, sewage, or repair waste such as paint chips and sanding dust commonly contribute pollutants such as copper, zinc, oil, and grease.

This is a broad category because **any of these signs of pollution could be at any of these water bodies. Watch for...**

- Soap or detergents
- Sanitary solid waste and/or toilet paper
- Fuel or oil sheens
- Paint or wax sheens, paint chips, sanding dust
- Fish processing waste

To report derelict vessels, use **Washington State DNR's Derelict and Abandoned Reporting Tool**





WATER POLLUTION

Foam

Be suspicious of foam in urban streams. Foam can signal a variety of pollutants, such as PFAS or detergents. To be safe, don't swim or let your pet drink from water that has a lot of foam in it.

Natural: Begins white but quickly turns tan, yellow, brown. It easily breaks apart if poked. It may smell earthy and have bits of dirt, plants, and insects.



NATURAL

TIP: Poke foam with a stick to see if it breaks apart. If so, it's probably natural!

Potentially polluting: Usually white, looks like bubbles. Will often see a rainbow sheen. May smell and look like soap. Tends to stick together even when poked.



ARTIFICIAL



WATER POLLUTION

Algal blooms

Algal blooms are becoming more common in the spring and summer months due to increased temperatures and nutrients in our waterways. Blooms can be **green, yellow, brown, pink, or even red**. Many algal species produce toxins that are harmful if they come in contact with your skin or are ingested. **Pets can get seriously sick and die from drinking water contaminated with algae!** Even algal blooms that don't produce toxins can be deadly. When algae dies and is consumed by bacteria, the bacteria use up the oxygen in the water, creating lethal conditions for fish and other aquatic species.



Freshwater algal bloom in Lake Padden

Saltwater bloom off Friday Harbor, San Juan Island



WATER POLLUTION

Oil sheens

If you poke fossil fuel sheens, the hole will quickly fill back in. **Natural sheens will break apart and not re-form when poked.**



THIS IS POLLUTION!

Fossil fuels will cause a sheen that does not stay broken apart

THIS IS NOT POLLUTION

This is a natural oil layer caused by plant matter



Don't have your own cleanup gear?

Borrow some from RE Sources!



You can call us at **(360) 733-8307** to arrange borrowing cleanup supplies!

- ☐ Grabbers
- ☐ Gloves
- ☐ Buckets
- ☐ Trash Bags

Or join us at one of our beach cleanups!



See what's on the calendar



 **RE SOURCES**



**You are on the front lines
of preventing pollution.**



OBSERVE • DOCUMENT • REPORT

Pollution Hotline: (360) 220-0556

www.re-sources.org • info@re-sources.org