

BE A WATERSHED WATCHDOG

How to Look for and Report Signs of Pollution in Waterways

This handy guide is intended to help you identify potential pollution in waterways and provide you with important contact information to report what you see.

Together, we all can help stop pollution!

SIGNS OF POLLUTION

- DISCOLORED OR MUDDY WATER
- SHEEN, FILM/FOAM
- ODOR
- GARBAGE, DEBRIS, FILL
- DEAD FISH
- ALGAL BLOOMS



WATER DISCOLORATION

- BROWN, GREEN, OR OTHER UNUSUAL COLORS
- MUDDY OR CLOUDY WATER
- SHEENS OR RAINBOWS ON WATER SURFACE
- FLOATING FILM, FOAM, OR SCUM

Water discoloration is a common sign of pollution. Oil sheens, water with an unusual color, and floating films or scum can be a sign of pollution. Although sometimes a result of natural mixing, muddy, brown, or cloudy water can also be an indication of pollution. It is important to note whether the discolored water is coming from a pipe, ditch, or other source and whether the discoloration affects the entire waterway or is limited to an area or “plume.”

UNUSUAL ODORS

Strong or unusual odors can be one of the most identifiable signs of pollution. Common odors include the smell of sewage, chemicals or petroleum, decay, and other acrid smells. While sewage odors can indicate an illegal overflowing sewer pipe or septic system failure, they can also be a result of a legal combined sewer overflow (CSO), which often occur after rain. Chemical, petroleum, or other acrid smells, on the other hand, can indicate an oil or chemical spill or the presence of fumes from contaminated land or groundwater.

- STRONG, ACRID, OR UNUSUAL ODORS
- SMELLS OF SEWAGE, CHEMICALS, OR PETROLEUM
- FUMES



WHAT TO DO

- Take photos and/or videos.
- Look for a point of discharge – a pipe, culvert, ditch, or other source.
- Write down exactly where you are and what time(s) you saw the pollution.
- Take clear and detailed notes of exactly what you see in the water.

WHO TO CONTACT

PA Dept. of Environmental
Protection
Spills and Emergencies:
1-800-541-2050
Environmental Concerns:
1-888-723-3721

Then call your County
Conservation District.

*Click here to find your county
conservation district and contact
information!*

Also, send information to
PennFuture at
info@pennfuture.org
SUBJECT: WATERSHED
WATCHDOG.



DUMPING



Illegal dumping can take many forms: garbage, debris, dirt, or even dirt fill or construction materials, such as rock or concrete, dumped or pushed into water bodies or wetlands can all be indications of illegal dumping. Since "open dumping" (where garbage or other solid waste is dumped instead of being properly disposed of in a landfill) is also illegal, be on the lookout for garbage, debris, tires, scrap, and other solid waste dumped on banks or shores.

FISH KILLS

Fish kills – massive amounts of dead fish at one time in one location – are often one of the first signs of environmental stress in an ecosystem. Fish kills may be caused by many things, including oxygen depletion in the water, disease or parasites, toxins, or nutrient loading. Fish kills can be an indicator of larger environmental problems and may have a direct impact on other uses of the water, such as recreation and drinking water supplies.



ALGAL BLOOMS



Excessive algae or aquatic plant growth can indicate an unnatural amount of nitrogen or phosphorus in the water, often caused by fertilizer runoff from land. In excessive amounts, these nutrients cause a type of pollution called eutrophication, which, in turn, results in the algal blooms that turn the water green and deplete the water of oxygen when the algae die and are eaten by bacteria. This decrease in oxygen in the water can result in fish kills (see above).

Visit www.pennfuture.org and join us in protecting our watersheds.