

Beach Pollution: The Facts

The Problem of Beach Pollution

Are you planning a beach vacation this summer? Did you know that daily activities that impact your local streams can also affect your favorite vacation spot? The coastal watershed contains many components, starting at the headwaters of streams in your community, continuing on to our Three Rivers, with the coast line the final drainage point. As local streams and our Three Rivers eventually flow to the ocean, these water bodies pass through a wide range of land uses including farming, housing, urban shopping districts, business parks, and recreational areas. As a result, various substances and debris can be deposited by this flow into coastal waters. Sometimes when water quality is too poor for swimming, local authorities are forced to close beaches.



Threats to Our Beaches

1. Excessive foot traffic can lead to erosion and destruction of vegetation.
2. Marine debris, or trash, can come from beachgoers, improper disposal of items on land, and stormwater runoff.
3. Too much nutrients can cause harmful algal blooms and fish kills. Excessive nutrients can come from sewage treatment plants, boating wastes, industrial discharge, deposition from air, and contaminated runoff.
4. Sewage overflows can release pathogens or disease causing microorganisms. Pathogens can cause a wide range of health problems—from sore throats to meningitis.
5. Excessive sediment from new construction and land development activities can cause water quality problems.

How To Find A Clean Beach

1. The Natural Resources Defense Council conducts an annual survey of water quality and public notification at beaches. The report is online at: <http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/titinx.asp>
2. If possible, choose beaches next to open waters or away from urban areas. They typically pose less of a health risk.
3. If there are pipes along the beach that drain stormwater runoff, do not swim near them.
4. Avoid swimming for at least 24 hours after heavy rains, which can wash pollution into the water.
5. When possible, swim at beaches that research shows has the cleanest water, are carefully monitored, and have strict closure and advisory procedures.