

Industrial Pollution

In the United States industry is the greatest source of pollution, accounting for more than half the volume of all water pollution and for the most deadly pollutants. Some 370,000 manufacturing facilities use huge quantities of freshwater to carry away wastes of many kinds. The waste-bearing water, or effluent, is discharged into streams, lakes, or oceans, which in turn disperse the polluting substances. In its *National Water Quality Inventory*, reported to Congress in 1996, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency concluded that approximately 40% of the nation's surveyed lakes, rivers, and estuaries were too polluted for such basic uses as drinking supply, fishing, and swimming. The pollutants include grit, asbestos, phosphates and nitrates, mercury, lead, caustic soda and other sodium compounds, sulfur and sulfuric acid, oils, and petrochemicals.

In addition, numerous manufacturing plants pour off undiluted corrosives, poisons, and other noxious byproducts. The construction industry discharges slurries of gypsum, cement, abrasives, metals, and poisonous solvents. Another pervasive group of contaminants entering food chains is the polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) compounds, components of lubricants, plastic wrappers, and adhesives. In yet another instance of pollution, hot water discharged by factories and power plants causes so-called thermal pollution by increasing water temperatures. Such increases change the level of oxygen dissolved in a body of water, thereby disrupting the water's ecological balance, killing off some plant and animal species while encouraging the overgrowth of others.

The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001-07. <http://www.bartleby.com/65/wa/watrpollu.html>