

Our Watershed. Our Responsibility.

By Heather MacLean

As environmentally conscious citizens, many of us sort recyclables from garbage and are aware of the benefits of organic composting. As we grow more concerned about the depletion of the earth and ways to prevent further destruction, we should remember that it is not only the land that needs protecting. It is also necessary to focus on keeping our water systems clean. Every day watersheds across Nova Scotia are inadvertently and sometimes intentionally polluted; leaving lakes, rivers, streams, and brooks, that many species call home, irreversibly damaged.



***The sludge entering this river will eventually taint the entire watershed and certainly doesn't quench anyone's thirst.
Courtesy of the Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation.***

Disposing of any waste, regardless of the amount, negatively affects a watershed and eventually causes the entire system to become polluted. There are two types of pollutants that are of particular concern to water quality. According to Environment Canada, the first type is the most hazardous and rapidly growing and includes some pesticides, petroleum, petroleum products, PCB's, and dioxins. These contaminants, including metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium, either break down very slowly or sometimes not at all, resulting in toxins that remain in the aquatic environment for years, causing significant damage. The harm they cause is either irreversible or takes decades to be removed from the system. The second type of watershed pollutants includes warm water from cooling towers, as well as floating debris and garbage. These are referred to as physical pollutants and although they are more easily broken down they can be extremely harmful to fish and other aquatic life.

It may take years for the toxins and harmful substances that are dumped into waterways to become evident. They still produce devastating effects whether we can see them or not. Everything from fish and plants to the water that humans use for drinking, bathing, cooking and cleaning is affected. It does not take long for the pollution source to disperse throughout the entire watershed.

Everyone is responsible for protecting our fragile watersheds. Residents and recreation enthusiasts alike share the responsibility of keeping chemicals and physical pollutants from entering watersheds. Through the purchase of environmentally friendly products and monitoring and reporting watershed pollution, we can help to ensure safe and healthy streams and rivers for generations to come.

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