

Urban Runoff

The Biggest Remaining contributor to Water Pollution

QUOTE by EPA Administrator Carol M Browner:

“Twenty-five years after the garbage-filled Cuyahoga River spontaneously caught on fire, the waters of the United States have improved dramatically. But we still have a long way to go. Forty percent of our rivers, lakes and streams are still not suitable for fishing, swimming or drinking. The pollution that streams off city streets, suburban lawns, factory sites, and farms is the *biggest* remaining contributor to water pollution. The past 25 years have taught us a simple, but important, lesson: Preventing pollution is far more effective than cleaning it up.

Reports indicate that non-point urban runoff and agricultural runoff together account for between fifty and eighty percent of contamination-related problems of our critical watersheds and oceans. Supertankers may crash and pipelines may break, but urban runoff is the largest source of oil and grease pollution. Officials estimate that 50 million gallons of oil disappear from automobiles in California each year- nearly twice as much oil as was spilled by the Exxon Valdez. Water, in the form of rainfall and irrigation, acts as nature's great cleaner by loosening the contaminants and washing them down the storm drains and into our water supply.

The contamination picked up by rainwater runoff will eventually end up in our own drinking water as well as at our favorite lake or beach. Reports indicate that we have more contaminants in our water today than we care to contemplate. Municipalities have been faced with the challenge of providing clean water for our use. To keep tap water safe for Californians to drink, nearly \$1 billion a year may have to be spent on cutting-edge technology as a response to agricultural and urban polluted runoff. Despite conscientious efforts to provide safe drinking water, many contaminants are almost impossible to eliminate. Experts agree that the less pollution that can reach our precious water stores, the easier it is to remedy the problem.

The solution to contamination in urban runoff is not out of reach where effective technology is at hand.