

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is the storm drain system? The storm drain system is the drainage network that carries water away from our neighborhoods. You generally see the catch basins or inlets on the side of the curb or gutter. These carry runoff to a pipe network that usually drains to a creek or the ocean. Storm drains and sanitary sewers are not connected. Storm drains are not connected to a wastewater treatment plant so the drainage goes straight to the beach! If you don't want to swim in it at the beach, don't dump it in the gutter.



What is storm drain pollution? Storm drain pollution is a loose term for a variety of pollutants that are found in the drainage from our streets and neighborhoods. In general, the more urbanized an area, the more polluted the runoff. Most of the pollutants come from the way we live our lives. Pollutants are picked up and carried to the storm drain when it rains (stormwater) and when we over irrigate, hose down outdoor areas, and wash our cars, etc. Here are some examples of typical storm drain pollution:

- **Sediment** from erosion and construction projects
- **Bacteria** from animal (domestic and wild) waste, illegal encampments and sanitary sewer overflows
- **Nutrients** (nitrogen and phosphorous) from fertilizers
- **Metals** (copper, lead, zinc) from vehicles brakes and parts
- **Oil and grease** from leaks and spills from vehicles, restaurants, and waste oil dumping
- **Organic compounds** (soaps, cleaners, solvents, etc.) from deliberate and unintentional dumping of these chemicals into the gutter or storm drain during car washing or other cleaning projects
- **Pesticides** (herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides, and insecticides) from residential or commercial pest control activities
- **Gross Pollutants** (trash, debris, leaves and yard waste) from intentional and unintentional dumping

Do we really have these pollutants in Encinitas? Definitely! Water quality has been monitored for nearly ten years in Encinitas. We see all of these pollutants in our waterways, but the most serious are bacteria, soaps, nitrogen (nitrates and ammonia), pesticides and copper.



How does storm drain pollution affect me?

When our creeks, lagoons and beaches are polluted, they become a public health and environmental threat. The most direct result of polluted water is when a beach is closed or posted with contamination warning signs because of high bacteria levels. The City and County of San Diego test the beaches frequently and when levels exceed set standards, the beaches must be posted with warning signs or closed altogether.

Postings and closures aren't good for our health or our economy, which thrives on good, clean beaches.

How do I affect storm drain pollution? The good news is that many of the pollutants we find in our waterways come from urban activities that we can change! Here are just a few things that you can do:

- **Sediment** – stop erosion on your property by protecting the soil with plants or mulch
- **Bacteria** - pick up after your pets
- **Nutrients** - use fertilizers with utmost care, don't over fertilize, use organic fertilizers
- **Metals** – drive less, car pool, keep your cars maintained
- **Oil and grease** - fix leaks quickly, clean up spills with absorbent, never hose down a spill, never put grease in the storm drain or sewer system (sinks or toilets), recycle motor oil
- **Organic compounds** (soaps, cleaners, solvents, etc.) - wash your car at a carwash (carwashes recycle their water) or over a landscaping area, minimize the amount of soap you use, dispose of cleaners and solvents as a hazardous waste at a household hazardous waste facility
- **Pesticides** (herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides, and insecticides) use environmentally friendly techniques and products, look into "integrated pest management"
- **Gross Pollutants** – put trash or litter in its place, clean up leaves and yard waste, use the City's green waste collection services

Want more information for specific activities? Check out our brochures.