

Water Quality: Non-Point Source Pollution

Nonpoint source (NPS) pollution is water pollution affecting a water body from diffuse sources, rather than a point source which discharges to a water body at a single location. NPS may derive from many different sources with no specific solution to rectify the problem, making it difficult to regulate. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), nonpoint source pollution is the leading cause of water pollution in the United States today, with polluted runoff from agriculture the primary cause.

Other significant sources of runoff include hydrological and habitat modification, stormwater runoff, and silviculture (forestry). Another important cause of NPS pollution is urban runoff of items like oil, fertilizers, and lawn chemicals. As rainfall or snowmelt moves over and through the ground, it picks up and carries away natural and human-made pollutants. These pollutants are eventually deposited into bodies of water, such as lakes, rivers, wetlands, coastal waters, and underground sources of drinking water.