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Pollution Facts

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Trash

Trash collects in thousands of Bay Area creeks and storm drains, which flow to the Bay. Every year, marine wildlife like harbor seals, sea birds and turtles, are killed when they eat or are entangled in trash.

What can you do?

First and foremost, don't litter. Participate in community cleanups, like Save The Bay's [volunteer events](#). Pick up trash when you see it in the street or at the Bay shoreline and creeks. [Support policies](#) that will reduce the amount of trash discharged to the Bay. Use less. Bring your own cloth bags when you go shopping and your own cup for coffee drinks. Let businesses you patronize know that you care about litter. Ask them to offer reusable alternatives, and make sure their trash cans outside are not overflowing!

Did you know?

A study found an average of three pieces of trash along every foot of Bay Area streams that lead to the Bay! 90 percent of trash in our waterways does not biodegrade.

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Car Pollutants

All cars and trucks, even hybrids, discharge oil and harmful metal particles such as lead, zinc, and copper. When it rains or when you wash your car in your driveway, these toxins flow directly into storm drains, then to creeks and the Bay.

What can you do?

Wash your car at a car wash instead of at home. Professional car washes treat the toxic soup that car washing generates before it is discharged into the Bay. Get your car tuned-up and fix leaks so oil and other fluids don't flow to the Bay. Drive less – walk, bike, or use public transportation. If you change your oil yourself, make sure you don't drip or spill any. And never dump the used oil!



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Save The Bay is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit
organization. Gifts are tax deductible to the
fullest extent of the law.

Did you know?

People spill, dump or leak three million gallons of oil a year into San Francisco Bay. Regular people and our cars leak more oil into waterways than oil tankers do.

Mercury

Mercury is toxic, and because of the large amount of leftover mercury from Gold Rush-era mining, it's critically important to reduce new sources of mercury into the Bay. Birds, fish, and people who eat Bay fish are at high risk of mercury poisoning.

What can you do?

Properly dispose of mercury-containing items – it is against the law to throw these items in the trash.

[Exchange](#) your mercury thermometer for a non-toxic one, and take thermometers and fluorescent light bulbs (both long tubes and compacts) to your [local household hazardous waste facility](#) for disposal.



[Check out this video of several pounds of mercury that didn't pollute the Bay!](#)

Did you know?

Mercury from one thermometer can contaminate 5,000,000 gallons of Bay water – or six Olympic-size swimming pools.
High mercury levels may be keeping Bay fish and wildlife from reproducing.

Pharmaceuticals

Many pharmaceutical drugs, such as painkillers, antidepressants, and hormones, are now being detected in creeks and bays. Flushed medications and leaky landfills are two sources of these contaminants, which can keep fish from successfully reproducing.

What can you do?

Don't flush your unwanted medicine down the toilet or put it in the garbage.
Dispose of unwanted or expired pharmaceuticals at a household hazardous waste facility or a pharmacy that accepts medication for proper disposal. [Click here](#) for a list of locations around the Bay.

Did you know?

Preliminary studies have found acetaminophen in San Francisco Bay water.
Studies have shown that chemicals from pharmaceuticals are inhibiting reproduction in fish found in many lakes, rivers and bays.

Pet Waste

Left on the ground, pet waste can wash into storm drains that flow directly into the Bay, degrading water quality with high levels of bacteria, threatening public health, and making Bay animals sick.

What can you do?

Always pick up your pet's waste – even in your own backyard – and throw the bagged waste in the trash.
Try biodegradable bags.
Keep dogs out of streams and stream banks.
Don't flush or compost your cat's waste.

Did you know?

A parasite common in cat feces has been linked to serious disease in sea otters.

Cat waste outdoors, in sewage systems or compost can wash the parasite into streams, where it can eventually reach the ocean.

Bacteria from pet waste can make swimmers sick at beaches many miles away.

This bacterial can also harm Bay fish and wildlife.

High bacteria levels occurred more than 5000 times at California beaches in 2005 and beachgoers were advised not to swim.