

What is wastewater and why do we treat it?

What is in wastewater?

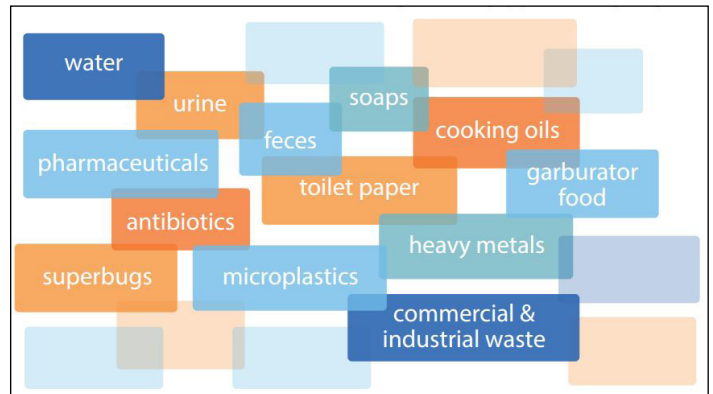
Wastewater is water that has been adversely affected by human use. Wastewater in the Capital Region contains urine and feces, water, soaps, shampoos, vitamins, antibiotics, pain relievers, antiperspirants, laundry soaps, microplastics, drain cleaners, and a myriad of other industrial, institutional, residents and commercial pollutants. Some of these pollutants are toxic.

Looked at another way, wastewater is water that has been used in homes and businesses in ways that reduce its quality. It includes contaminated water from household sinks, showers and washing machines, and effluent from industry, businesses, hospitals and other institutions.

Why do we treat wastewater?

Wastewater treatment helps to remove pollutants from wastewater and protect the health of the public and environment. Every community has a responsibility to ensure that its sewage and treatment process is not adversely affecting the marine, air or terrestrial environment, or human health.

In 2006, an environmental report commissioned by the Ministry of Environment noted the contamination of seabed sites near the Macaulay and Clover Point Outfalls. As a result, in 2006 the CRD was mandated by the B.C. Ministry of Environment to plan for and initiate secondary treatment (or better) for the region.



In 2012, the federal government also passed a law requiring all high-risk Canadian cities to provide, at a minimum, secondary sewage treatment by 2020 at the latest. The CRD's core area was deemed to be in the high risk category.

High concentrations of contaminants from wastewater can have negative effects on fish and wildlife and can result in beach closures and restrictions on shellfish harvesting. It is important to note that no level of treatment can remove all contaminants from wastewater. Source control is the most effective way to reduce these trace contaminants and the CRD has an extremely effective source control program.

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Who is responsible for monitoring and treating wastewater?

The CRD is responsible for treating and disposing of the Core Area's wastewater. The CRD controls trunk services to collect wastewater from the core area municipalities, monitors the marine environment, tracks inflow and infiltration and reduces contaminants in sewage through the Regional Source Control Program. The CRD also encourages regular maintenance of septic systems in the core area.

What else is being done?

The Regional Source Control Program is a pollution prevention initiative aimed at reducing the amount of contaminants that industry, businesses, institutions and households discharge into the municipal sanitary wastewater collection systems. The program has been active region-wide since August 1994. Source control is a cost effective way of improving wastewater quality and achieving some protection of the environment.

The CRD monitors a range of water quality indicators and tests for over 200 substances in the region. It also takes samples of the sea floor sediment and the sea life living near each outfall to assess the health of the environment near the outfalls.

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