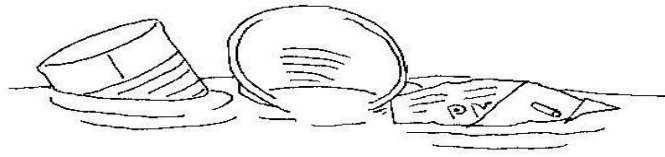


WHAT IS NON-POINT SOURCE POLLUTION?

by Cherie Schadler



Although we often see **pollution** in various forms, it is classified into two groups - **point source pollution** and **non-point source pollution**. Point source pollution is a direct form of pollution that can be traced to its point of **origin** (where it started) such as a hot water discharge into a creek from a manufacturing plant, or an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico from a ship. These pollutants can be traced back to their points of origin by following the pollution trail. The pollution often enters the water body at a distinct location and is a continuous source of the same kind of pollution. Because of these traits, point source pollution is easier to identify and control.

However, unlike point source pollution, non-point source pollution cannot be traced to its point of origin, as it has diverse origins. Rainwater washes soil, fertilizer, and pesticides from farm fields as well as urban areas. Litter is a universal problem. It is nearly impossible to trace the origins of all the litter we see beside the road.

Ninety-five percent of the pollution that is thrown or dumped onto the ground ends up in the waterways. People often don't realize that many of us get our drinking water from the very rivers, lakes, and underground **aquifers** that we are polluting. It's amazing to realize that some of the items we throw out of the window can take up to six hundred years to break down in the **environment**, yet we continue to litter anyway. Can you imagine how much gum, candy wrappers, cigarette butts, soda cans, plastic bottles, and dirty diapers are floating in our rivers?

It is everyone's responsibility to help keep the water clean and healthy. The best way to help stop non-point source pollution is to not throw or dump anything on the ground and to pick up litter that you see. It's just as easy to throw your gum paper into a litter bag in the car than it is to throw it out of the window. Then, when you go to the filling station or when you get home, you can empty the trash from your litter bag. Remember, whatever happens upstream, affects the water quality for every living thing downstream. If we all work together we can have clean waterways where we fish and swim.