

Humboldt
Baykeeper

Inland Empire
Waterkeeper

Klamath
Riverkeeper

Monterey
Coastkeeper

Orange County
Coastkeeper

Russian
Riverkeeper

San Diego
Coastkeeper

San Francisco
Baykeeper

San Luis Obispo
Coastkeeper

Santa Barbara
Channelkeeper

Santa Monica
Baykeeper

Ventura
Coastkeeper

Slow and Sink Storm Water

In Brief

Storm water pours more contaminants into California's coastal waters than any other source of pollution, causing numerous beach closures and other problems. Rainfall, irrigation systems, and water sources flow over streets, lawns, parking lots, industrial sites and other "hardscapes," picking up pollutants and speeding them directly into our storm drains, which then whisk the wastes - untreated - to our streams, lakes and ocean. Storm water carries trash, oil, pesticides, bacteria, metals, sediment and other pollutants directly to the waterways we use for fishing, swimming, and drinking.



Legal Landscape

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) and California's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act require California to control pollutants in storm water. Unfortunately, these laws have not been implemented fully or consistently, and key permits are many years overdue. In 2011, the State Water Resources Control Board finally is taking up the statewide Industrial Storm Water Permit (last updated in 1997), Caltrans' Statewide Storm Water Permit (last updated in 1999), and the "Phase II" Municipal Storm Water Permit (for municipalities under 100,000 people and other specified entities). The revised permits must ensure that storm water discharges do not impact the health of beaches and other receiving waters. The Board is also considering a Trash Policy that will reduce the significant volume of trash pollution carried by storm water to our coast.

Moving Forward

Storm water capture and reuse is one of the most sustainable and low-energy water supply strategies available to California, and is more cost-effective than desalination or dams. By advancing the use of low-impact, or "green," infrastructure and development patterns, which slow storm water flow and allow it to sink and recharge basins, California will achieve the dual benefits of sustainable, low-energy water supplies and fewer contaminated waterways.

Learn more. Review information on the State Water Board's storm water permit programs at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/stormwater/. Watch a video by the San Francisco Estuary Institute to learn more about how cities are using innovative techniques to reduce runoff: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aErRvs35Ttw>, and the Water Board's "Slow the Flow" video at: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/stormfilm/>.

Key Issues: Water Quality, Storm Water, Low-Impact Development, Green Infrastructure