

The Clean Water Act Fact Sheet

- ✓ The Clean Water Act was enacted by Congress in 1972 to address water pollution in the US.
- ✓ The Clean Water Act was passed when 60% of waterways in the US were **not** “fishable or swimmable”. Today, because of the Clean Water Act, roughly 40% of waterways are not “fishable or swimmable”, reflecting a 20% improvement in the quality of our waterways.
- ✓ Only three years before the passage of the Clean Water Act, the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland was so polluted that it caught fire. It is believed that sparks from a passing train ignited oil and other pollutants in the water.
- ✓ The goal of the Clean Water Act was to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.
- ✓ The interim goals of the Clean Water Act were to achieve “fishable and swimmable” waters by 1983, and eliminate all discharges of pollutants into navigable waters by 1985.
- ✓ According to USEPA, “fishable and swimmable” meant that a level of water quality should be achieved “for the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife, and to provide for recreation in and on the water.”
- ✓ The Clean Water Act was passed by the federal government; however, each state is responsible for enacting it through a Water Quality Standards Program (WQS).
- ✓ The Water Quality Standards program acts as a road map for achieving the goals of the Clean Water Act by doing three specific things: **designating uses** of each water body in the state, establishing **numeric, biological, and narrative criteria** to protect those uses, and protecting levels of good water quality in waters that already meet their designated uses.
- ✓ Possible designated uses of waters in your state include, **primary contact recreation** (swimming), **secondary contact recreation** (boating and wading), **municipal water source** (water to be treated for drinking water), and **aquatic habitat**.
- ✓ If a business, industry, or other entity wants to discharge into a waterway, it has to obtain a permit from the state. The permit should limit pollution amounts according to the **water quality criteria** established for the designated use of the waterway. For example, a waste water treatment plant would not be

allowed to discharge more than 130 colonies of *E. Coli* (a fecal coliform bacteria) per 100 milliliters of water into a stream designated for primary contact recreation.

- ✓ In the case of an interstate waterway, such as the Ohio River, a business or industry that wants to discharge into the Ohio River must obtain a permit from the state agency where its facility will be located. Then an interstate agency, such as the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission, will review the permit to ensure that it meets numeric, biological, and narrative criteria that they have established for the Ohio River.
- ✓ If a waterway is assessed and doesn't meet the water quality criteria established to protect its designated use, it is considered **impaired**.
- ✓ Each state is responsible for identifying and writing clean up plans for impaired waters.
- ✓ State and interstate agencies are required to send out **public notices** on water quality decisions, including permits or changes in water quality standards. It is **your responsibility** to make sure the Clean Water Act is enacted properly by submitting your written or oral comments on water quality decisions. Information about water quality decisions in your state can be found on your state agency's website.

Kentucky: <http://www.water.ky.gov/>

Ohio: www.epa.state.oh.us

Indiana: www.in.gov/idem