

# UNDERSTANDING WATER QUALITY - WHAT YOU CAN DO

## Glossary of Water Quality Terms

In fact sheets and other informational materials, everyday language is used as much as possible. But many publications on water quality use technical terms. Here is a handy glossary to explain these terms.

**Aerobic Decomposition:** Decay of organic matter by bacteria and other micro-organisms.

**Algae:** Aquatic plants.

**Anaerobic Decomposition:** Decay of organic matter caused by micro-organisms in an oxygen-free environment.

**Animal Waste:** Livestock and poultry feces and urine, processing water, dead animals, feed, bedding, litter and soil with which they become mixed.

**Aquifer:** A sand, gravel or rock formation capable of storing or conveying water below the surface of the land.

**Assimilative Capacity:** Natural ability of surface and groundwater to accept potential pollutants without harmful effects.

**Best Management Practices:** A practice or combination of practices that provide an effective, practical means of preventing or reducing pollution from non-point sources.

**Biological Oxygen Demand:** A measure of the concentration of biologically degradable material present in organic wastes.

**Coliform Bacteria:** A group of bacteria found in human or animal intestines commonly used as an indicator of pathogens.

**Conservation Practice:** Measures commonly used to eliminate or reduce pollutants.

**Contaminant:** Any solute or potential pollutant which is introduced into an aquifer or water body.

**Cultural Eutrophication:** Process whereby human activity increases the amount of nutrients entering surface waters.

**Discharge:** The flow of surface water in a stream or canal or the outflow of groundwater from a flowing artesian well, ditch or spring.

**Dissolved Oxygen:** Oxygen dissolved in water which is readily available to plants and animals.

**Drawdown:** The vertical drop of the water level in a well during groundwater pumping.

**Eutrophication:** Natural or artificial process of nutrient enrichment whereby a water body becomes filled with aquatic plants and becomes low in oxygen content.

**pH:** A symbol used to indicate an acid or alkaline condition.

**Point Sources:** Release of a contaminant from a pipe or other discrete source into a body of water or watercourse.

**Pollutant:** Any substance of such character and in such quantities that when it reaches a body of water, soil or air, it degrades it to the point that it impairs its usefulness or makes it offensive.

**Porosity:** The degree to which the total volume of soil, gravel, sediment or rock is permeated with pores or cavities through which water or air can move.

**Precipitation:** Rain, sleet, snow or dew.

**Receiving Waters:** All distinct bodies of water that receive runoff such as streams, rivers, ponds, lakes and estuaries.

**Recharge Zone:** Areas of land that allow water to replenish an aquifer.

**Resource Management System:** Combination of conservation practices and management to protect the resource base.

**Runoff:** That portion of the precipitation or irrigation water which leaves the field over the surface and appears in surface streams or water bodies.

**Sediment:** Soil particles carried by rainwater into streams, lakes, ponds, estuaries and drainageways; the result of erosion.

**Structural Controls:** Erosion control measures which require a capital investment and construction activities to install.

**Total Dissolved Solid:** All material that passes the standard glass fiber filter; used to reflect salinity.

**Toxicity:** The degree to which a chemical detrimentally affects an organism.

**Turbidity:** A measure of water cloudiness caused by suspended solids.

**Vegetative Controls:** Control measures which usually involve cropping systems, permanent grass or other vegetative cover to reduce erosion and control pollutants.

**Water Table:** The upper level of a saturated zone below the soil surface.

**Watershed:** All land and water within a drainage area.