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The ubiquitous storm drain / Pay attention

Published: Wednesday, December 5, 2007



Yes, that's a photograph of a storm drain. An ordinary, common storm drain. There are, of course, thousands of them. And they are killing [Barnegat Bay](#).

Few waterways in rapidly developing coastal southern [New Jersey](#) are immune from the threat of storm-runoff pollution, but development pressures along both shores of the narrow Barnegat Bay make it particularly vulnerable.

"All the signs are here that the Barnegat Bay is sick, if not dying," [Tim Dillingham](#), executive director of the [American Littoral Society](#), said in June, while announcing a unified campaign, Nitrogen Pollution Action, to focus on the problem.

Four months earlier, a [Rutgers University](#) researcher also called attention to the problem. Some 2.5 million pounds of nitrogen per year are flushed into the bay, said [Michael Kennish](#), of the [Rutgers Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences](#). The nitrogen input from storm drains is a significant contributing factor to that problem, Kennish said.

It's a familiar story to environmentally sensitive coastal residents, but overall public consciousness of the problem remains relatively low.

When it rains, large amounts of nitrogen from our overfertilized, manicured lawns wash down storm drains, which in many cases empty directly into the nearest body of water. In Barnegat Bay and other places, the nitrogen fuels algae growth, which blocks sunlight from the bay bottom. The lack of sunlight kills sea grass, which is an important shellfish habitat. When the algae bloom dies, the decomposition process sucks oxygen out of the water, further stressing marine life.

The more developed an area is, the more runoff is created. Unfortunately, in terms of meaningful, bay-saving controls on development around Barnegat Bay, the battle is mostly over - and lost. The best we can hope for now is to pay more attention to those storm drains and what they wash into the bay.

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The good news is that people *are* paying more attention. Last week, [Long Beach](#), Barnegat and [Little Egg Harbor](#) townships joined with the [Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) to announce an "Adopt a Storm Drain" program. Other coastal towns have similar programs. The idea is to get volunteers to monitor particular drains - and to raise the public's consciousness.

Anything that gets people to pay more attention to those prosaic iron grates at the curb is a good idea. So by all means, go out and adopt a storm drain of your very own. Even more important, educate yourself and others about the overall issue. As [Greg Auriemma](#), chairman of the [Ocean County Sierra Club](#), put it: "You can't continue to build McMansions and chemical-cocktail lawns and expect to

have a healthy bay."


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Let us keep this in reasonable perspective. Where would the environmentalist lobby suggest we send storm drain run off? Do they have a bottomless pit of money so every township can construct a space-age device to make it evaporate into thin air? This type of rhetoric always sounds good, but humans inhabit the planet and not vice versa. Let ue know when you have a remedy and the \$\$\$ to fund it.

 Posted by: Vito Mudd on Thu Dec 6, 2007, 8:33 AM [Report Abuse](#)

The nitrate problem is a similar biochem cycle that took phosphate out of detergents. A misfortune produced by the confluence corporate greed, mindless consumerism and dumb legislation. Grass (of the lawn variety) has been know to be environmentally deleterious for many decades, yet homeowners may be fined for the lack of it. Meanwhile, green lawn owners are polluting the land and waters with insecticides, herbicides, fertilizers and wasting precious potable water on it. It spreads displacing native plants. Here is a good case I believe that grass should be illegal. Realtors and developers are quite anxious to scar pristine lands with roads and homes, sewers and drains. Legislation too often goes with the money. Ironically, the features promoting development are degraded by the development. Capitalism is unsustainable. Evidence had been hidden by transferring the cost to other places - rain forests, third world sweat shops and small struggling communities in far away places. The problems are too big to hide much longer. The answer may be in awareness. s always, reduce, reuse and recycle. ~S~

 Posted by: strongheart on Wed Dec 5, 2007, 10:57 AM [Report Abuse](#)

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