

# Eye on the Environment: Follow these steps to cut pollutants flowing to ocean

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Guest writer

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A swim in the ocean can be fraught with danger — and not necessarily because of pesky sharks or a strong undertow.

The danger comes from pollutants that often find their way into the sea from the Ventura County watershed.

Recent campaigns by the Community for a Clean Watershed to boost public awareness of pollution prevention have had an effect. Ventura County beaches are the cleanest in Southern California. Nonetheless, there is still much we can all do.

In Ventura County, the runoff from neighborhoods, farmland and open spaces is collected by four major watersheds — the Ventura and Santa Clara rivers and Malibu and Calleguas creeks — plus coastal estuaries. All empty into the Pacific Ocean.

None of this water goes through a filtering or treatment process. What's on your driveway is in the watershed, and it's a short trip to the ocean.

Residents can do much to ensure the water flowing from their homes, down gutters, into storm drains and eventually into the ocean is clean. Here are the top five pollutants and what we can do to keep them out of the watershed:

**Trash:** Paper cups, gum wrappers and cigarette butts dropped into gutters and washed into storm drains are examples of careless littering that harms the watershed. Litter can also come from uncovered trash bins with the help of wind or hungry sea gulls. Trash from a fast-food meal left in the back of a pickup truck quickly becomes litter at 50 mph.

To keep litter out of the watershed, simply keep trash can lids tightly closed, make sure items in truck beds are covered or tightly secured, and pick up water bottles or other litter that falls out of your car and dispose of it properly.

**Automotive fluids:** Spent oil and other automotive fluids are not trash and must be disposed of properly. Certified used oil collection centers are available at some auto parts or repair shops, or at your city's household hazardous waste events.

Even when we follow this rule, car fluids can still pollute the watershed. Leaking oil builds up on driveways and roads. These toxic fluids accumulate until washed through the storm drain system during the first rains of the season. Check your car for leaks regularly and get them fixed.

**Pesticides and weedkillers:** Residential landscape chemicals are serious watershed pollutants. Pesticides, once applied, are often washed into gutters by overwatering or rain. Use only the amount recommended on the label, or try using even a smaller amount. Look for less-toxic alternatives (for example, instead of weedkiller, a 2-inch layer of mulch could keep weeds at bay). To avoid runoff, do not overwater, and do not apply pesticides, weedkillers or fertilizers before a rain.

**Metals:** Dust from brakes, outside decorative copper displays and other metal materials is not usually thought of as a water pollutant, but it can be toxic to aquatic life. Some smaller cars can use nonmetallic or organic brake pads. Ask your mechanic if your car qualifies. If decorative copper or other metals are outside your home, make sure the dust drains into the landscaping instead of the gutter.

**Bacteria:** Pet waste, dirty diapers and discarded food are all sources of bacteria that can make people sick. Pick up after your dog and dispose of the waste properly in trash cans. The same is true for baby diapers and food waste.

The Community for a Clean Watershed is a coalition of storm-water quality management agencies in the cities and unincorporated areas of Ventura County. Its message is "The watershed should only shed water," and its goal is to raise awareness among residents and business owners about issues affecting the health of Ventura County's watershed.

To learn more about how to keep the watershed clean, go to <http://www.cleanwatershed.org>.

— *Arne Anselm is a water quality manager for the Ventura County Watershed Protection District. Representatives of government or nonprofit agencies who want to submit articles on environmental topics for this column should contact David Goldstein at 658-4312 or [david.goldstein@ventura.org](mailto:david.goldstein@ventura.org).*

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