



THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NATIONAL

COASTAL AND MARINE POLICY

The nation's coastal and marine waters are unique, irreplaceable resources that must be protected.

Policy Statement:

The Environmental Protection Agency will protect, restore, and maintain the Nation's coastal and marine waters to protect human health and sustain living resources. We will take actions to further reduce pollution of these waters and limit the effects of increasing coastal populations. Future uses of these resources that are vital to the Nation's growth, economy, and security can and must be conducted in an environmentally sound manner.

Goals:

Protection of the Nation's coastal and marine waters is a shared responsibility of the governments and people of this nation. Therefore, we are committed both to public education and involvement and to establishing partnerships among federal agencies, state and local governments, interest groups, and private citizens to achieve the following goals:

- Recovery of full recreational use of shores, beaches, and water by reducing sources of bacterial and other contamination, plastics, floatables, and debris.
- Restoration of the Nation's shellfisheries and salt-water fisheries and protection of marine mammals and living resources by controlling pollution and causes of habitat degradation and loss.
- Minimize the use of coastal and marine waters for waste disposal by strictly limiting ocean dumping, tightening controls on land-based sources, and establishing aggressive programs to reduce the amount of waste generated by our society.
- Greater understanding of the effects of pollution on complex coastal and marine ecosystems by expanding scientific research and monitoring programs, and the development of new technology.
- Leadership by the United States in protection of the world's oceans by aggressively promoting international efforts to stop pollution and protect critical marine habitats and living resources.

As a nation we are too accustomed to using coastal and marine waters for the disposal of our wastes. We must enforce existing laws, and where laws limit our ability to take action, we must seek solutions, establish stronger policies, and pass new laws if necessary. Aggressive programs which seek to reduce the total volume of pollutants disposed of in coastal and marine waters will motivate the Nation to find more acceptable resource recovery, waste minimization and disposal alternatives.

Implementation:

We have identified specific objectives to achieve the goals of our coastal and marine policy. These objectives are set with the knowledge that the solutions to coastal and marine pollution are complex and will require the commitment of people and governments at all levels. Commitment means time, energy, money, and, the understanding and will to change personal habits and to make hard decisions to manage growth.

GOAL: Recovery of full recreational use of shores, beaches, and water by reducing sources of bacterial and other contamination, plastics, floatables, and debris.

Objectives:

1. To Control Medical Wastes and Other Marine Refuse:

Medical Waste Management: We will control disposal of medical wastes and aggressively enforce laws to protect the public from exposure to them.

Plastics/Floatables/Debris: We will accelerate efforts to identify the sources of floatables, debris, and plastics. We will control these materials through new technologies and substitutes, permitting, and enforcement, as well as aggressive source reduction and waste minimization programs.

2. To Control Sources of Bacterial and Other Contamination:

Point Sources of Pollution: We will revise and reissue permits, and enforce permit terms and conditions to control bacterial and other contamination from sewage treatment facilities and combined sewer overflows whenever contamination threatens or limits water use. Through technical assistance and other available means, we will assist state and local governments in upgrading, building, and permitting treatment facilities.

Nonpoint Sources of Pollution: We will assist state and local governments and coastal zone management agencies in carrying out programs to control bacterial and other contamination from agricultural and stormwater runoff, failing septic systems, and other nonpoint sources that threaten or limit water use.

GOAL: Restoration of the nation's shellfisheries and salt-water fisheries, and protection of marine mammals and living resources by controlling pollution and causes of habitat degradation and loss.

Objectives:

1. To Control Pollution:

Land-Based Sources: We will control pollutants that harm coastal and marine organisms and their habitats, including both toxic and conventional pollutants and nutrients from point and nonpoint sources.

Nonpoint Sources: We will develop and demonstrate with other federal agencies and state and local governments special agricultural and stormwater control techniques. We will assist state and local governments in identifying and implementing the most protective measures for coastal areas through State Nonpoint Source Management Programs.

Conservation Reserve: We will work under the Conservation Reserve Program to increase the amount of agricultural land used as filter strips around lakes, streams, and wetlands which are tributaries to coastal and marine waters. The use of filter strips reduces sediments and other pollutants that enter our watersheds and threaten coastal waters.

Ocean Discharge Criteria: We will issue and reissue permits for point sources to coastal waters only after an analysis of the impacts of the discharge on the marine community. Where necessary, these permits will require alternatives to discharges at the site and the monitoring of living resources to ensure that the permits are protective.

New Sources: We will not allow degradation of coastal waters from new sources. A decision to permit a new source will be based on an evaluation of the current health of the receiving water and the impact additional pollution will have on water quality and the diversity and productivity of living resources. We will achieve the lowest possible discharge rate, volume, and toxicity, and evaluate alternatives to discharges at the site. Waste minimization and reduction programs will be required whenever feasible.

Offshore Sources: We will issue permits to offshore facilities which specify special limits, operating conditions, monitoring, and reporting to ensure no unreasonable degradation of the marine environment. If unreasonable degradation appears possible, we will require evaluations of the alternatives to discharges at the site and additional permit conditions.

Criteria and Standards: We will develop and implement water quality advisories and criteria for pollutants of concern in coastal and marine waters. We will focus on two kinds of pollutants in particular: those pollutants that persist and accumulate, threatening to degrade water and sediment quality; and those pollutants that concentrate in the tissues of living resources or affect their productivity.

In-Place Contaminated Sediments: We will improve our ability to determine the effects of in-place toxic pollutants on coastal and marine environments. Where coastal and marine waters are threatened by toxic pollutants in the sediments, we will investigate and apply techniques for site cleanup. We will also develop criteria establishing limits on the concentrations of certain pollutants in sediments for use in source controls and permitting.

Atmospheric Deposition: We will accelerate efforts to determine the effects that atmospheric deposition of both nutrients and toxics has on coastal and marine waters. We will vigorously enforce existing standards, continue to develop new standards, and require the application of appropriate controls on new sources of concern.

2. To Limit Habitat Degradation and Loss:

Sanctuaries: We will work to expand the number and extent of estuarine sanctuaries under the National Estuarine Research Reserves and marine sanctuaries under the National Marine Sanctuaries.

Coastal Barrier Resources Act: We will increase efforts to protect sensitive coastal areas from development by expanding the areas set aside for protection under the Coastal Barrier Reserve System to include wetlands, critical aquatic habitats, and other non-developed coastal areas.

Wetlands/Habitat Protection: We will work with other federal agencies and state and local governments to ensure no overall net loss of wetlands, submerged aquatic vegetation, tidal flats, and other critical habitats. We will avoid the loss of critical habitats, and where such loss cannot be avoided, we will require full functional compensation. In addition, we will work to increase habitat by restoring damaged areas and creating new habitat.

Subsidies: We will work with federal agencies, state, and local governments to identify and eliminate federal, state, and local programs which provide incentives or expenditures that adversely affect coastal areas.

Coastal Zone Management Program: We will work at the federal, state, and local levels to use the Coastal Zone Management Program, and other land use authorities, to prevent new growth and development in coastal areas that threatens to degrade coastal environments. We will foster education programs about the impacts that growth and development can have on water quality and living resources, as well as provide information about mitigation techniques.

3. To Reduce Risks and Impacts of Accidental Discharges:

Prediction: We will improve environmental prediction and management techniques to limit the possibility of accidental releases of pollutants to coastal and ocean resources.

Emergency Response: We will ensure that clean up actions under the National Contingency Plan attain or exceed federal environmental standards for habitat protection and loss mitigation.

GOAL: Minimize the use of coastal and marine waters for waste disposal by strictly limiting ocean dumping, tightening controls on land-based sources, and establishing aggressive programs to reduce the amount of waste generated by our society.

Objectives:

1. To Address Ocean Dumping:

Industrial Wastes and Sewage Sludge: We will eliminate ocean dumping and incineration at sea of industrial wastes and sewage sludge. We will strictly limit the dumping or incineration at sea of all other materials and we will actively seek demonstrations of alternatives, including source reduction, recycling, reuse, waste minimization and reduction, as well as land disposal.

Dredged Materials: We will maintain strict standards to ensure that disposal of all dredged materials will not degrade coastal and marine waters. The use of clean dredged materials for beach nourishment, marsh creation and restoration will be encouraged.

Radioactive Wastes: We will continue the prohibition on the disposal of high-level radioactive wastes and we will continue to support the current international voluntary moratorium on the disposal of low-level radioactive wastes in coastal and marine waters under the London Dumping Convention.

2. To Tighten Controls on Land-Based Sources:

Enforcement: We will ensure timely and appropriate enforcement actions for permitted facilities that are not in compliance.

Targeting: We will work with the states to target inspections and audits to further protect near coastal waters. Inspections will be used to not only assess compliance, but to identify best management practices and proper operation and maintenance which can further reduce pollution. Illegal direct and indirect discharges will be identified and eliminated, minor sources evaluated, and permits revised as needed.

3. To Foster Alternatives:

Waste Reduction: Reducing volumes and toxicity of waste generated will be a top priority in every waste management program. We will foster the development of new technologies to reduce the amount of waste generated, increase the recycling of products and byproducts, and expand the use of safe, biodegradable products.

Hazardous Waste Minimization Policy: We will work to reduce the volume and toxicity of all hazardous materials.

GOAL: Greater understanding of the effects of pollution on complex coastal and marine ecosystems by expanding scientific research and monitoring programs, and the development of new technology.

One of the primary problems we face in addressing degradation of coastal waters is the fact that we know too little about them. We need to increase our knowledge of the various pollution sources and how each of these sources, alone or in combination, affects our coastal resources. Pollution control programs have traditionally focused on the protection of human health and therefore, principally fresh water. The marine sciences have focused on "blue waters", the open oceans, instead of coastal waters.

Therefore, one of our highest priorities is to add a new focus for coastal science and coastal programs. In coastal and marine waters, living resources should serve as the indicators of the health of the ecosystem and of our success or failure in controlling pollution. To learn more, we must combine the talents of research

scientists, coastal engineers and land use planners, with those of environmental resource managers at all levels of government. And, we must combine the efforts of governments with the efforts of the scientific and academic communities.

Objectives:

1. To Promote Greater Attention to Coastal Science Needs:

Research and Monitoring: We will expand the federal and state coastal and marine research and monitoring programs through an interagency strategic plan to:

- (a) determine the current health of the Nation's coastal and marine waters;
- (b) identify and understand the impacts of all types of pollution on the coastal and marine environments;
- (c) understand how estuarine and marine organisms are affected by pollution;
- (d) develop methods to pick up early indications of stress and recovery in estuarine and marine organisms;
- (e) develop and evaluate methods to restore and create coastal habitats; and
- (f) establish a national monitoring and reporting network for scientists and resource managers to determine if pollution control programs work.

2. To Develop and Apply New Technology:

National Estuary Program and Geographic Initiatives: We will expand the National Estuary Program and special initiatives such as the Gulf of Mexico Initiative. These programs are primary means to achieve our goals in selected estuaries and coastal areas. They are also critical for developing new management techniques, new technologies, targeted scientific studies, and financing mechanisms at the federal, state, and local levels.

Technology Transfer: It is imperative that our coastal science agenda be translated into an action agenda. Therefore, we must also educate and inform those who use coastal resources about balancing amongst conflicting uses. We will expand our efforts nationally to educate, inform, and train scientists and environmental resource managers at all levels to help them acquire the skills needed to deal with complex environmental problems and difficult management decisions.

National Public Forum on Land Use: We will convene a national public forum of federal, state, and local governments and private experts to determine the best way to reduce land-use impacts on coastal and marine waters.

GOAL: Leadership by the United States in protection of the world's oceans by aggressively promoting international efforts to stop pollution and protect critical marine habitats and living resources.

Objectives:

1. **Land-Based Sources of Pollution:** We will support the development and implementation of international agreements that strengthen control of land-based sources of pollution through the U.N. Environment Program, and the Caribbean and South Pacific Regional Seas Programs.
2. **Ocean Disposal of Wastes:** We will promote the acceptance of existing world agreements, such as the London Dumping Convention, that control the disposal of wastes at sea.
3. **Pollution from Ships:** We will promote the acceptance of regional and global agreements, such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) that control and prevent the discharge or spill of oils, hazardous substances, and other materials from ships.
4. **Specially Protected Areas and Endangered Species:** We will support the development, implementation, and enforcement of international agreements that protect critical habitat and endangered species, such as a protocol for specially protected areas and wildlife in the Caribbean through the U.N. Environment Programs.
5. **Coastal and Marine Science:** We will support and participate in: (a) international science organizations, such as the Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution, the World Meteorological Organization, the International Council of Scientific Unions, and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, and (b) bilateral agreements with other nations to investigate marine pollution, global climate warming, and sea-level rise.