

How often are industrial facilities illegally discharging contaminated water?

The Indicators Project also looked at how many times industrial facilities in West County violated their regulatory permits by releasing more contaminants than legally allowed. Every industrial facility must obtain a permit from the Regional Board, called a National Pollution Discharge and Elimination Permit (NPDES), which outlines how much wastewater a facility is allowed to discharge.

According to data from the California Integrated Water Quality Information System for January 2005 through October 2008, there were a total of 19 facilities in violation of their permits, 17 of them with repeat violations (Table 4). All of the violations listed are for illegal contaminant discharges.

The Regional Board also issues violations for monitoring and reporting failures. For example, if a facility did not monitor a certain chemical on a daily basis as required by law, it would receive a violation notice. From 2005

through October of 2008, there were 51 reporting and monitoring violations, and one instance where a facility was cited for failure to pay fines for a total of 52 administrative violations spread among eight facilities.⁸

Other studies and sources of data indicate that industrial facilities in West County are contributing to water contamination. In a national study on permit violations from industrial facilities, Contra Costa was one of the top 25 counties in the U.S. with the most industrial facilities exceeding their NPDES permits.⁹ It should also be noted that these are just illegal discharges; facilities are allowed to discharge a certain amount on a regular basis. In 2005, for example, Shell Oil released 542,497 pounds of contaminants into surface waters; Chevron released 430,777 pounds of contaminants.¹⁰ While these releases are each individually legal, they add up to a considerable cumulative load of pollutants entering West County waters on a daily basis. Further, industrial facilities contribute regularly to urban run-off—the largest source of water contamination in the Bay Area.

Table 4: ILLEGAL WATER DISCHARGES FOR CONTRA COSTA INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES, 2005–2008

Facility	Violations
Rhodia, Inc.	1
Tesoro Refinery — Golden Eagle Waste Water Treatment Plant	1
Chevron Richmond Refinery	2
Crockett Cogeneration	2
Dow Chemical Company	2
GWF — Site I Power Plant	2
US Navy Groundwater Treatment Plant, Pt. Molate	3
West County Waste Water District	4
Mt. View Sanitary District	5
City of Pinole Wastewater Treatment Plant	6
GWF Power Systems, Site IV	10
USS POSCO Industries	11
General Chemical Waste Water Treatment Plant	13
Richmond Water Pollution Control Plant	16
PG& E Shell Pond	20
Rodeo Sanitary District Wastewater Treatment Plant	21
Shell Martinez Refinery	25
Discovery Bay Treatment Plant	30
ConocoPhillips Refinery, Rodeo	32
TOTAL VIOLATIONS	206

Source: California Integrated Water Quality Information System