
DUMPSTERS & WATER POLLUTION

It's truly amazing just how many dumpsters there are in a typical watershed. There will be one to a dozen for every office, shop, restaurant, convenience store, supermarket, etc. If just one in twenty dumpsters is leaking then this could make for a large amount of water pollution. Fortunately, keeping dumpsters benign comes down to a few easy maintenance steps.



Most dumpsters are located in areas open to the public so it's also easy to identify those which are well-maintained and those needing greater attention. We suggest you pass this factsheet on to dumpster owners-renters in your watershed. If a dumpster looks well-maintained then include a Thank You note. If you find problem indicators, then point this out, but make it clear you are a volunteer and not an official. Refer the owner-renter to the local health department or code enforcement agency if they want an official opinion.

MINIMIZING DUMPSTER WATER POLLUTION

The following steps will reduce the potential for dumpster pollution:



Inlet & Dumpster Leak

1. Keep the lid closed to prevent rain entry;
2. Whenever possible, locate dumpsters away from storm drain inlets;
3. Dumpsters should sit on a paved surface, not on bare soil;
4. Dispose of kitchen and restaurant wastes (e.g. fats, oils, and grease) in special grease dumpsters;
5. Ensure trash, grease, etc. doesn't overflow;

6. Avoid disposing of liquids in a dumpster;
7. When cleaning the dumpster interior minimize the amount of water used and discharge the liquid to a sanitary sewer (if permitted); and

8. Get a dumpster replaced when it begins rusting, cracks appear or other damage occurs which may allow liquids to seep from the dumpster.

LOCATING PROBLEM DUMPSTERS



Drive the roads throughout your watershed and see if dumpsters are present at apartment complexes, office buildings, shopping centers, restaurants, stand-alone businesses, convenience

stores, government offices, etc. Usually dumpsters are located behind buildings. Newer ones may be screened from view with fencing. ***Please do NOT enter areas marked Private, No Trespassing, and so forth.***

ASSESSING DUMPSTERS FOR PROBLEM INDICATORS

In addition to looking for the eight minimization items to the left, check for indicators that the dumpster has reached the actively polluting stage. Look for liquid seeping from the container or stains showing where liquid had seeped downhill to the nearest storm drain inlet or waterway.



Stain from Leakage



White stain is from dumpster leakage

THANK YOU FOR WELL-MAINTAINED DUMPSTERS

Consider something like a thank-you email or letter sent to the owners of well-maintained dumpsters. Say that you are a volunteer working to keep local waters safe for people and fish. Part of your volunteer activities include a survey of dumpsters for pollution reduction measures. If your local or state government has prepared a dumpster factsheet then include a copy or this factsheet with your correspondence. This simple step of thanking someone for doing the right thing can provide many benefits lasting far into the future. See an example email-letter on the next page.

GETTING POLLUTING DUMPSTERS FIXED

As with all pollution sources, you have two options for achieving correction:

- Contact the owner of the establishment served by the dumpster; or
- Report the problem to a government agency (health department, code enforcement, etc.).

If you contact the owner-renter then assume they are not aware that a problem exists. Assume also that they will respond reasonably if you are reasonable and courteous. Make certain that they know you are a concerned citizen, not a government official. Urge them to contact the local health department or code enforcement agency if they want an official opinion on the condition of their dumpster. Provide them with a copy of any government factsheets available or this one. Allow a week or two to correct serious problems. The correction for a leaking dumpster is usually a new container. A larger dumpster or an additional one may be needed where the current container is overflowing. You will find a sample email-letter to the right.



Spilled Grease



Rain can enter open dumpsters

THANK YOU EMAIL-LETTER

Dear Ms. Smith:

I'm a volunteer with the Jones River Watershed Association. Our goal is to restore all of the River and her tributary streams to a condition we call *Child Safe & Friendly Waters*. Extensive pollution currently keeps these waters from being a place where our kids can play. A small part of this pollution comes from poorly maintained dumpsters. I and a number of other volunteers recently participated in a survey of the watershed to assess the condition of many dumpsters. We were delighted to see that those serving (establishment name) have benefitted from good maintenance. The enclosed (attached) factsheet provides further detail on dumpster maintenance. On behalf of the Association and our children I offer our heartfelt thanks for keeping your dumpster in good condition.

Sincerely,
Jane Doe

PROBLEM FOUND EMAIL-LETTER

Dear Ms. Smith:

I'm a volunteer with the Jones River Watershed Association. Our goal is to restore all of the River and her tributary streams to a condition we call *Child Safe & Friendly Waters*. Extensive pollution currently keeps these waters from being a place where our kids can safely play. A small part of this pollution comes from poorly maintained dumpsters. I and a number of other volunteers recently participated in a survey of the watershed to assess the condition of numerous dumpsters. We believe we have found the following issues with the dumpster(s) serving (establishment name):

- lid was open which could allow rain to cause liquid to flow from dumpster; and
- dumpster has begun to rust which could lead to holes allowing contaminated liquid to flow from the dumpster.

We are volunteers, not government officials. If you would like an official opinion on the condition of the dumpster then I suggest contacting the Jones County Health Department. The enclosed (attached) factsheet provides further detail on dumpster maintenance.

Sincerely,
Jane Doe