

How Does Wastewater Differ from Storm Water?

While storm water is a result of rainfall, wastewater is any water that is used in industrial, commercial, or residential activities and is exposed to impurities or becomes polluted. The water that runs down your drain at home and the water discharged by a manufacturing plant are both examples of wastewater.

Generally, wastewater is treated to remove pollutants and impurities before it is released back into streams and rivers. Most wastewater from homes and businesses travels through underground sewage pipes, commonly called *sanitary sewers*, that take it to a sewage treatment plant where large volumes of wastewater are treated. Wastewater also can be discharged directly into waterways by industrial facilities that use a lot of water and treat their wastewater on site to remove pollutants before discharging it into a nearby river.

Both storm water and wastewater are major sources of water pollution; however, each pollutes water bodies in a different way. Wastewater pollutes when sewage treatment plants and industries do not sufficiently remove pollutants and wastes before releasing into a waterway. These releases are often referred to as end-of-pipe discharges because industrial facilities discharge the water through a pipe that drains directly into a water body. Storm water pollutes when storm water runoff picks up pollutants in its path and transports them to nearby waterways.