

Water pollution is a problem in Scotland

Sewage spills have increased by 40% in the past five years.¹ The river Clyde is the worst UK river for pharmaceutical pollution.³ 80% of Scottish coasts tested have high concentrations of microplastics.⁴

Can it affect my health?

Yes. Water pollution can produce cyanobacteria that can cause fever-like symptoms, vomiting, diarrhoea or even kidney and liver damage.⁵

Microplastics can leach and adsorb chemicals toxic to humans and increase the risk of cancer.⁶

Swimming in sewage polluted waters can cause gastrointestinal illness, eye, ear, nose and throat infections.⁷

Are there environmental impacts?

Yes. In 2020 only half of Scotland's freshwater was rated as being in a 'high' or 'good' ecological condition.⁸

Microplastics are damaging wildlife with serious consequences for human health.⁹ Pollution has caused the loss of 50% of marine life since the 1940s.¹⁰

Raw sewage was released into Scottish waters over 12,000 times in 2020. Only 3% of release points are monitored so the real number will be higher.²

What causes water pollution in Scotland?

Sewage, wastewater, plastics, chemicals, pollutants from air and diffuse pollution.

Diffuse pollution is the release of pollutants as runoff from houses, roads and industrial areas. In rural areas, it is mainly nutrient and pesticide run-off from soil coming from farming and forestry.¹¹

What is the Scottish Government doing about water pollution?

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is the lead agency for the River Basin Management Plan 2021-2027 and regulates Scotland's water environment through Controlled Activity, Pollution Prevention and Control, and Water Management Licensing Regulations. SEPA regularly monitors designated bathing waters.

We all have the right to
**CLEAN
WATER AND
SANITATION**

Get involved

Contact:

[Marine Conservation Society](#)

[Forth Rivers Trust](#)

[Coastal Communities Network](#)

[Clyde River Foundation](#)

[River Carron Conservation](#)

More information

[Seasonal bathing water conditions around Scotland](#) / [Report an incident to SEPA](#)

What can I do if I have a concern?

Contact our Rights Officer to talk more at rights@ercs.scot

Contact our free legal advice service at www.ercs.scot/get-advice

Call our office on **0131 358 0038** or freephone on **0800 861 1738**

¹ The Ferret (4 July 2021) [Sewage spilled into Scotland's waterways more than 12,000 times](#)

² Ibid

³ Wilkinson et al. (2022) [Pharmaceutical pollution of the world's rivers](#)

⁴ The Ferret (10 July 2022) [Microplastics found in 80 per cent of Scottish coastal waters in last two years](#)

⁵ Krokowski (16 November 2021) [A bloomin' year for algae and cyanobacteria, Scotland's Environment](#)

⁶ Rahman et al. (2021) [Potential human health risks due to environmental exposure to nano- and microplastics and knowledge gaps](#)

⁷ Leonard et al. (2018) [Is it safe to go back into the water?](#)

⁸ SEPA (accessed November 2022) [Water classification hub](#)

⁹ Turell (2020) [Estimating a regional budget of marine plastic litter](#)

¹⁰ Dryden & Duncan (2022) [Climate regulating ocean plants and animals are being destroyed by toxic chemicals and plastics](#)

¹¹ SEPA (accessed August 2022) [Diffuse pollution](#)