



Summary of the Clean Water Act

Quick Links

- [PDF of CWA](#) (234 pp, 1 MB)

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- The official text of the CWA is available in [the *United States Code* on FDSys](#), from the US Government Printing Office

33 U.S.C. §1251 et seq. (1972)

The Clean Water Act (CWA) establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters. The basis of the CWA was enacted in 1948 and was called the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, but the Act was significantly reorganized and expanded in 1972. "Clean Water Act" became the Act's common name with amendments in 1972.

Under the CWA, EPA has implemented pollution control programs such as setting wastewater standards for industry. EPA has also developed national water quality criteria recommendations for pollutants in surface waters.

The CWA made it unlawful to discharge any pollutant from a point source into navigable waters, unless a permit was obtained. EPA's [National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System \(NPDES\)](#) permit program controls discharges. Point sources are discrete conveyances such as pipes or man-made ditches. Individual homes that are connected to a municipal system, use a septic system, or do not have a surface discharge do not need an NPDES permit; however, industrial, municipal, and other facilities must obtain permits if their discharges go directly to surface waters.

Compliance and Enforcement

- [Clean Water Act Compliance Monitoring](#): investigations and inspections
- [Water Enforcement](#)

History of this Act

- [History of the Clean Water Act](#)
- [EPA History: Clean Water Act](#): documents and other resources

More Information

The [Office of Water \(OW\)](#) ensures drinking water is safe, and restores and maintains oceans, watersheds, and their aquatic ecosystems to protect human health, support economic and recreational activities, and provide healthy habitat for fish, plants, and wildlife.

- The [EPA Watershed Academy](#) provides training courses on statutes, watershed protection, and other key Clean Water Act resources.

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