

The Disposal of Waste in the Ocean

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INTRODUCTION

No one would dispute the wisdom of protecting the sea and its life against harm from man's wastes. An argument can be made, however, that some of the laws the U.S. and the coastal states have adopted in the recent years to regulate the wastes that can be put into the oceans are based on inadequate knowledge of the sea. It is possible that a great effort will be made to comply with laws that will do little to make the ocean cleaner.

This discussion of waste disposal will be limited to disposal in the ocean; it will not take up disposal in lakes, rivers, estuaries, harbors and landlocked bays. Indeed, part of the problem is that insufficient distinction has been drawn between the ocean and the other bodies of water, whose chemistry, circulation, biota, and utilization differ from those of the ocean in many ways. It is not sensible to try to write one set of water-quality specifications that will cover all bodies of water. My concern here is only with the quality of ocean water and marine life along the US Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts. The scientific findings in those areas apply, however, to nearly any other coastal waters that are exposed to ocean waves and currents.

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