

Water Quality: A Vital Component of Public Health and Ecosystem Sustainability

Marilyn Krickl*

Department of Ecology, Institute for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK

Perspective

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***For Correspondence:** Marilyn Krickl, Department of Ecology, Institute for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK; **E-mail:** m.krickl@ieh.ac.uk

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DESCRIPTION

Water quality refers to the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of water and its suitability for various uses, such as drinking, irrigation, recreation, and supporting aquatic ecosystems. The quality of water plays a critical role in public health, agriculture, and environmental sustainability. As freshwater resources become increasingly threatened by pollution, overuse, and climate change, understanding and managing water quality has become essential for safeguarding both human and environmental well-being. This article explores the importance of water quality, the factors that affect it, and the strategies needed to protect and improve it.

The importance of water quality

Water is essential for life, yet its quality can directly impact human health and ecosystems. Poor water quality can lead to various health issues, such as waterborne diseases, contamination with toxic substances, and long-term effects from industrial and agricultural pollutants. Clean water is essential not only for drinking and sanitation but also for food production, as agriculture relies on water for irrigation and livestock, and ecosystems depend on water quality for biodiversity and ecological functions.

Public health: Contaminated water can cause a wide range of diseases, including cholera, dysentery, and typhoid, which are caused by harmful microorganisms. Chemicals such as pesticides, heavy metals, and pharmaceuticals can also pose long-term health risks, including cancer, organ damage, and developmental issues.

Ecosystem health: Freshwater ecosystems support diverse species of plants and animals, which depend on clean water to thrive. Pollution, habitat degradation, and climate change can disrupt these ecosystems, leading to a decline in biodiversity and the loss of valuable ecosystem services, such as water purification, flood regulation, and carbon sequestration.

Agriculture and food security: Water quality is closely linked to agricultural productivity. Contaminated water can affect crop yields and soil health, while polluted irrigation systems can introduce harmful substances into the food supply. Additionally, poor water quality can affect livestock health and lead to reduced agricultural productivity.

Factors affecting water quality

Several factors influence the quality of water, ranging from natural processes to human activities. Key factors include:

Pollution: Pollution is one of the leading causes of water quality degradation. Sources of pollution include agricultural runoff (pesticides, fertilizers), industrial discharges (heavy metals, chemicals), untreated sewage, and urban runoff. These pollutants can contaminate surface water and groundwater, making it unsafe for human use and harmful to aquatic ecosystems.

Nutrient pollution: Nutrient pollution, often from agricultural runoff, occurs when excess nitrogen and phosphorus enter water bodies. These nutrients promote the growth of algae, leading to Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) that deplete oxygen levels, disrupt aquatic life, and contaminate drinking water sources.

Sedimentation: Erosion caused by deforestation, construction, or agricultural activities can lead to sedimentation, where excess soil particles enter water bodies. This can reduce water clarity, harm aquatic habitats, and clog filtration systems.

Microbial contamination: Pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, and protozoa, can contaminate water through fecal pollution from human and animal waste. Poor sanitation systems, untreated wastewater, and stormwater runoff are common sources of microbial contamination.

Heavy metals and toxic chemicals: Industrial processes, mining, and improper waste disposal can introduce toxic substances such as Mercury, Arsenic.