

# Spotting and Reporting Illegal Discharges

Detecting and eliminating illegal discharges to storm sewers or drainage ditches is an important part of protecting the quality of our streams.

Residents can help the Clermont Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) tackle illegal discharge problems by serving as an “extra set of eyes.” Following are some things that may indicate an illegal discharge, and tells you what should be done if you see one.

## Sensory Indicators

Sensory indicators are observations that can be made using smell or sight, and require no sampling or measurement equipment. Some indications of an illegal discharge are:

- Flow from a pipe during dry weather
- Unusual color or cloudiness
- Strong pungent odor
- Floating debris
- Oil sheen
- Dead vegetation or inhibited growth
- Dead animals
- Stains on channel bottom or sides
- Pipe corrosion

## Flow

Flow coming from storm water pipes during extended periods of dry weather may be an indication of an illegal discharge. If you see this, call Clermont SWCD at 732-7075, Ext:3 or email [jmcmamus@clermontcountyohio.gov](mailto:jmcmamus@clermontcountyohio.gov) with a description of the location.

## Odor

Some illegal discharges can have a noticeable odor. Make sure the source of the odor is coming from the discharging pipe before reporting it; sometimes nearby animal waste, shrubs, trash, or carrion (decaying organic matter) may be the source of the odor rather than the flow from the pipe.

If an odor is detected in the water or stream body, look for other visual indicators that may make your determination easier. Some sources of the odor:

- **Sweet**- detergent or chemicals
- **Sour**- sewage or decay
- **Rank**- raw sewage or carrion
- **Fuel** smell can indicate motor oil, gas, etc.

If an odor is detected, look closely for floatables and any colors (such as a rainbow sheen typical of oil spills).

## Color

Illegal discharges can exhibit many different colors - opaque, green, brown, red, orange, yellow, white, gray. The density of the color is usually associated with the concentration of the discharge; the darker the color, the heavier the concentration. Also, look for a rainbow sheen, suds, or foam to tell what the cause might be (sewage, chemicals, bacteria). Sometimes, the source can be identified by following the color plume upstream; however, do *not* enter private property to do this. Rather, contact the Soil & Water office to report the problem.



## Turbidity

Turbidity is a measure of the cloudiness of the water, or how easily the water is penetrated by light. Turbid water can be cloudy and light, or thick and viscous. The source of the discharge may be found by following the turbidity plume upstream. A plume will look like a cloud or concentration of the discharge (identified by color) in the water that is being carried along by the current. It will appear less concentrated and ultimately thinner as it moves further away from the discharge point.



**Indicator: turbidity**

## Floatables

This is mostly a visual observation but may not be seen until investigating another indicator such as odor or turbidity. Sewage, oil sheen, and suds are examples of floatables that may indicate an illegal discharge, while trash is generally not. Sewage can be toilet paper or fecal matter. An oil sheen will be a rainbow-colored film on top of the water. Suds will be foamy and usually carry a sweet detergent smell or heavier chemical smell and color. *Small amounts* of brownish or yellowish foam is a natural breakdown process in a stream so long as there is no other indicator found with it. An excessive amount may indicate sewage.

## Iron-oxidizing Bacteria

Something that may appear to indicate an illegal discharge may actually be a natural occurrence. One such substance is iron-oxidizing bacteria that can build up in low-flow areas appearing as a thick, rust-colored sludge or slime found along stream beds and rocks producing a strong, sulfuric odor. There is no need to report the iron bacteria as an illegal discharge as it is part of a naturally-occurring process and is not toxic. However, if you are in doubt, play it safe and call.



## What to Do if You Spot an Illegal Discharge

### **Contact Information for Reporting or Questions Concerning Illegal Discharges:**

#### **Sewage Discharge:**

Clermont Co. Water & Sewer:  
513-732-7040  
Batavia: 513-732-2020  
Milford: 513-831-7018  
Moscow: 513-553-6870  
New Richmond: 513-553-4146  
Williamsburg: 513-724-6107

#### **Septic Systems:**

Clermont Co. Health District:  
513-732-7499

#### **All Other Illicit Discharges:**

Clermont SWCD: 513-732-7075  
jmcmanus@clermontcountyohio.gov

**EPA SPILL HOTLINE: 800-282-9378**

**CALL 911 IF IMMEDIATE THREAT TO HEALTH OR SAFETY**