

WATER POLLUTION  
AND  
THE GROWTH OF THE PROBLEM IN CONNECTICUT

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Water has always been one of America's most important resources and one of its cheapest and most versatile.

The United States still has as much water as it always had, but the demands upon it have increased. Unfortunately, many of these demands must be categorized as misuse or abuse of this valuable resource. It is not quantity, but rather quality, that is lacking.

Connecticut has a water pollution problem as do all the states. It is not a problem that has grown overnight. From the earliest days of settlement, the people of Connecticut have been bound to and dependent upon its coastal and inland waters. Good farm land was to be found in the river valleys. The waters teemed with fresh and salt water fish.

By the early eighteenth century, however, Connecticut was becoming a manufacturing region. The rivers were essential for power, equally essential for waste disposal.

By mid-nineteenth century, metallic wastes such as copper, lead, and silver were discharged with the waste waters, as were increasing loads of acids, soaps, cleaning fluids, coal oil, and tars. Outdoor privies lined river banks in the more populated areas. Little regard was given to the needs of the next town, of the next factory, or of the farmer through whose pastures the befouled streams ran.

The state's valuable shellfisheries in Long Island Sound were being endangered as early as Civil War days. This danger worsened until, in 1965, Connecticut did not have a commercial oyster set.

Knowledge that serious diseases such as typhoid and cholera were

caused by waterborne bacteria brought residents of Connecticut, by the 1880s, to recognize what eyes and noses had long been telling them—the waters of Connecticut were dangerously polluted.

From 1884 to 1966, the State of Connecticut and the Federal Government conducted numerous surveys of pollution in Connecticut. The first state anti-pollution act was passed by the General Assembly in 1925, and a State Water Commission was created. Connecticut was one of the first states to recognize the necessity of legislation to keep its waters clean.

Yet, in the forty years following this act, the problem continued to grow as population and industry continued to grow. The 1925 act was not doing the job.

Connecticut's demands for clean water have multiplied rapidly since World War II and supply can no longer keep up. Three per cent of the rivers of Connecticut are so foul as to be classified as nuisances, unfit for any purpose, even waste disposal.

While 93 per cent of the state's rivers are still "virtually" unpolluted, the yearly intrusion of industrial parks, housing projects, and highway developments pose a distinct threat to these waters.

The United States Water Quality Act of 1965 and the State of Connecticut Public Act 57, "An Act Concerning the Elimination of Pollution of the Waters of the State," should now make it possible for the state to begin cleaning up polluted waters and protecting clean waters.

It is costing the nation \$13 billion annually in damages from water pollution. The longer pollution is tolerated, the higher the costs will be, and if tolerated long enough, the costs will be prohibitive.