

# Clean Water Is A Transparent Wish In Florida

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**T he sharks** in the water are not the problem.

The water is.

It's 25 years after the nation adopted the Clean Water Act. Take a good look around and note what's sloshing about in Tampa Bay, the Hillsborough River • any waterway in Florida.

OK, OK. Raw sewage no longer floats atop Tampa Bay. Some rivers are cleaner, and industries have made significant gains in cutting pollution during the past few decades. But cleaner is not clean.

Ammonia, antimony, ethylbenzene, lead, N-hexane, nitrate compounds, phosphoric acid, sodium sulfate, toluene, xylene, zinc and zinc compounds still gush into Hillsborough County rivers, bays and streams.

About 24,000 pounds of the stuff, in fact, entered local waterways in 1999. In 1994, it was about 3,400 pounds. Cleaner?

The amounts are from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ``**toxics** release inventory," as self-reported by federally regulated industries in the area. The 2000 statistics have not been reported yet.

Taking Inventory The inventory, in the EPA's words, provides "accurate information about potentially hazardous chemicals and their use so that communities have more power to hold companies accountable and make informed decisions about how toxic chemicals are to be managed."

But has it been put to that use? Has any pollution data collected by local governments and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection been used for that purpose?

Here's the staggering fact: The state has yet to regulate pollution and set limits for the state's waterways.

Yes, it's working on setting limits and might - by 2014. But only because it was forced by environmentalists who sued in federal court.

That's how waterways are protected in a state that ranks sixth in the nation for industrial sites that violate the Clean Water Act and 10th nationally for municipal facilities violating the act. Cleaner?

**State Laxity** A new EPA study reports that states generally are so lax in enforcing pollution laws that polluting has become **profitable**. Meanwhile, the Bush administration is cutting \$25 million and 270 jobs from the agency's own pollution enforcement. The president wants to shii the money to - where else? - the states.

**Gov. Jeb Bush** is right in step with letting states, instead of the EPA, handle polluters. And it is his environmental policy that, once pollution limits are set for waterways, agricultural businesses will be exempt from if they merely show they have a plan to curb runoff.

Meanwhile, toxic **blue-green** algae caused by farming runoff are killing Central Florida lakes. Cleaner?

Remember, too, that voters approved a "Polluter Pays" amendment to the Florida Constitution that said agriculture must pay to dean up its pollution of the Everglades. Five years later, the state is still refusing to enact a law that does that.

That's dealing with water pollution Florida-style. The public demands dean and gets taken to the cleaners.

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