



Gasoline Spills Fact Sheet

- Gasoline tends to evaporate quickly on the surface of the water compared to heavier oils, although not all of this very toxic chemical evaporates. Gasoline, even in small amounts, can adversely affect fish and plants that live there.
- Gasoline is extremely flammable and care must be taken to avoid unintentional ignition of the material. Accidental fires may damage sensitive ecosystems.
- Gasoline vapors may be toxic to birds and mammals at high concentrations. Direct contact with the fuel can cause irritation of the skin and eyes and gasoline ingestion may result in death.
- On land, spilled gasoline can rapidly penetrate soil potentially causing groundwater or surface water contamination. Below the surface, gasoline can persist in soil or sediment for a longer period of time.
- Gasoline trapped in sediment may cause harm to worms, insects and shellfish that live in or feed off the sediment. The young of fish that spawn in gravel beds may be harmed by gasoline exposure.
- Gasoline tends to float on top of the water and affects those plants or animals that spend their time on or at the surface of the water or the surrounding land. Direct contact with the fuel can cause irritation or damage to fish gills and the skin or outer covering of aquatic animals. If contact is extensive, fish, invertebrate and amphibian kills may be observed. Sensitive life stages, such as amphibian eggs that float near the surface, may be injured by gasoline exposure.
- Some components of gasoline will dissolve into the water and may adversely affect fish and invertebrates. These chemicals generally act as an anesthetic in animals, resulting in impaired swimming ability and feeding behavior at low concentrations and death at higher concentrations. This altered behavior may make animals more susceptible to predation.
- Plants and algae that come in contact with gasoline may show color loss or decay, harming both the plants and the animals that depend on them for food and shelter.
- While gasoline may not persist in the water for long, fisheries can take longer to recover if significant impacts to fish, their young and prey occur. Persistence of gasoline in sediment may also slow recovery of the ecosystem.