

Polluted River Nile in Egypt



Nile pollution in Egypt became a problem after 1970 and the completion of the Aswan High Dam. Before then, river pollutants were washed away with the annual flood. The dam has however tamed the surging floodwaters that would annually flush pollutants out of the Nile system and into the Mediterranean.

- Farmers have been forced to use about a million tons of artificial fertilizer as a substitute for the nutrients which no longer fill the flood plain. There has been a four-fold increase in the use of chemical fertilizers since the dam and much of this pollutes the Nile as run-off.
- Poor drainage and over-irrigation has led to increased salinity. Over half of Egypt's farmland is now rated as medium to poor soil.
- Parasitic illnesses have increased, notably bilharzia – associated with the stagnant water of the fields and the reservoir.

Key sources of pollution in the Nile include:

- Agricultural run-off from irrigation – chemical fertilizers are seeping back into the river – and, because more water evaporates in irrigation systems, it has higher saline levels.
- Sewage from cities, towns and villages is dumped into it in untreated or partially treated form.
- Industrial waste from factories situated along the river.
- Domestic rubbish.
- Fisheries.

Though Egypt is dependent on the Nile for 98% of its water needs, the nation has fouled the river with untreated municipal and industrial wastes and agricultural chemicals. From the Aswan High Dam north to the Mediterranean Sea, the Nile's waters are

used again and again by each village and town and by every farmer's field. Before it even gets to Cairo, the river is laden with pollution and carrying so much salt leached from croplands that the water must be desalinated before it can be used for agricultural and municipal purposes further downstream.

Cairo suffers from water pollution as the sewer system tends to fail and overflow. On occasion, sewage has escaped onto the streets to create a health hazard. This problem is hoped to be solved by a new sewer system funded by the European Union, which could cope with the demands of the city. The dangerously high levels of mercury in the city's water system has alarmed global health officials who are concerned over related health risks.