

The **Alabama Rivers Alliance** strives to unite citizens statewide to promote the protection and restoration of Alabama's waterways. Our current programs include:

- The **Healthy Watersheds Program** focuses on the protection and restoration of water quality in Alabama's rivers
- The **Flowing Waters Program** promotes natural flow regimes in order to ensure healthy ecosystems
- The **Watershed Leadership Program** grows the capacity of Alabama citizens and groups to protect and restore rivers
- The **Alabama Water Agenda** empowers citizens to improve water policy and reduce the major threats to our waters

## IMPORTANT ADEM CONTACTS

[www.adem.state.al.us](http://www.adem.state.al.us)  
Main Number: 334-271-7700  
Ombudsman: 1-800-533-2336  
Water Division: 334-271-7823  
Field Operations: 334-394-4382  
Permits and Services: 334-394-4326

### Field Offices

Decatur: 256-353-1713  
Birmingham: 205-942-6168  
Montgomery: 334-260-2700  
Mobile: 251-450-3400

*River Protection Essentials* are publications designed to provide citizens with helpful information that can be used to protect their local waters. This educational piece provides the basic information needed to notify the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) about problems associated with water quality.

To ensure compliance with discharge permits, ADEM relies on self-reporting of permit violations in addition to site inspections. Citizens are an integral component of the enforcement and compliance program and can help reduce water pollution by reporting potential problems.



## River Protection Essentials

*Alabama Rivers Alliance*

# HOW TO FILE A WATER QUALITY



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**Alabama Rivers Alliance**  
*Water Is Life*

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## WHEN TO FILE A REPORT

Consider filing a water quality report with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) if you observe illegal discharges or observe indications of poor water quality. It's not safe to assume ADEM already knows about any water quality problem!

### Some indications of poor water quality:

- Dramatic changes in appearance of water
- Unusual color of water or sediment
- Increased or accumulated sediment
- Unpleasant or abnormal odor
- Oil, grease, foam, or sheen
- Dead or malformed fish
- Nuisance aquatic plants such as algae
- Occurrence of illness associated with water contact activities or fish consumption

Be aware of normal waterway conditions and how the water body is affected by wet and dry weather. Know the source of discharge pipes in your area and when they are allowed to discharge. Any discharge that is not allowed under an ADEM permit is illegal. To find permitted facilities in your area contact ADEM, use the Surf Your Watershed website <http://cfpub.epa.gov/surf/locate/index.cfm>, or contact a local watershed group in your area.

## HOW TO REPORT THE PROBLEM

- Call ADEM ombudsman 1-800-533-2336. They will determine which department can best deal with the problem and direct you to the appropriate person. Emailing and faxing complaints are also options. ([cej@adem.state.al.us](mailto:cej@adem.state.al.us), fax 334-394-4383)
- If the source of the problem is known, you may consider contacting that facility directly as they may not be aware of the problem. Be sure to contact ADEM as well.
- You do **NOT** have to give your name and contact information when reporting a problem. However, ADEM can not follow up with you without this information.
- Be sure to write down the name and number of the person you spoke with at ADEM.
- If reporting a problem after-hours, leave a very detailed message.
- For emergency or accidental spills after-hours, call your local county Emergency Management Agency (<http://ema.alabama.gov>) for spills of more than 25 gallons or the National Response Center at 800-424-8802.

## INFORMATION TO HAVE BEFORE CALLING

- Exact location of site so inspector can easily find the problem. Photos, maps, and global positioning system (GPS) coordinates are helpful.
- Driving directions to the site from a known landmark or major highway intersection.
- Source of problem, if known or suspected. (i.e. land use, construction site, industry, sewer system, etc.)
- If applicable, have discharge permit number available. (Some land development activities are required to post the permit number at the site entrance)

## WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN MAKING A REPORT

- ADEM will forward the complaint to an inspector who will document her/his findings.
- You may request a copy of the complaint and inspector's report. Citizen complaints are tracked differently in each department of ADEM.
- ADEM should assess the problem within 24 hours of the complaint. However, there is no standard amount of time when action must be taken by ADEM.
- It is important to follow up with ADEM as often as possible until the problem is corrected.