

# Goodbye, Cleveland

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)

When I was a kid, the guys in my crowd used to view changing the oil in our cars as sort of a manly rite of passage on the way to adulthood. We'd dump the used oil down the nearest sewer laughingly, saying, "Hello Cleveland," knowing that it would travel through the Great Lakes waterways to the cities downstream. That was before the age of ecological awareness, but we still had the realization the oil was going somewhere.

Now, because of that same disposal process, every two-and-a-half weeks; home mechanics create an oil spill the size of the one at Valdez, Alaska. Each year, 1.2 billion gallons of oil are guzzled by vehicles in the U.S. with half of it burning up in the engines they lubricate (a major source of pollution itself) while the other 600 million gallons are removed at oil-change time.

The American Petroleum Institute, an industry association, estimates that at least 240 million gallons of the latter figure (the EPA thinks even more) are improperly disposed of during home changes by being dumped in sewers, directly onto the ground or in the garbage which then winds up in landfills.

This largely unseen, unrecorded ecological disaster has far-reaching effects. Motor oil easily contaminates ground water when it seeps through landfills. When it reaches lakes, streams and rivers from sewer systems, it interferes with photosynthesis and the water's oxygen level and can introduce oil into the food chain. When oil goes through sewage treatment facilities it disrupts bacteria which breaks down organic waste and results in the release of improperly-treated sewage into water systems. A quart of oil can foul the taste of a quarter-million gallons of drinking water.

Now we all live in Cleveland.

Related article: Stopping the Industrial Hydra by George Bradford, *Fifth Estate* #333, Winter, 1990

# fifth Estate

E.B. Maple (Peter Werbe)  
Goodbye, Cleveland

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/333-winter-1990/goodbye-cleveland>  
Fifth Estate #333, Winter, 1990

**[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net)**