



CITY OF PORTLAND
OFFICE OF HEALTHY WORKING RIVERS



1120 SW Fifth Ave., #1000, Portland, OR 97204 ♦ Charlie Hales, Mayor ♦ Ann Beier, Director

The Willamette—Swimming’s Good!

Water Quality—Trending Toward Excellent

The Willamette’s a wonderful river, waiting for rediscovery by Portlanders. It not only runs through our city’s center, supports a globally significant commerce, hosts wild salmon, and is beautiful in every season—it’s a clean river once again. In fact, according to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality’s Water Quality Index, the [Willamette has recently rated as high as excellent](#). There’s still a lot of [work remaining to fix fish and wildlife habitat](#) and clean the Superfund site, but the river water itself is clean.

DEQ Says—Safe for Swimming

After decades of work on the Big Pipe, green streets, and other watershed actions improving river health, DEQ has recognized Portlanders’ efforts by [declaring the river generally safe for swimming](#).



What About the Superfund site? Swimming’s OK there, too.

Contamination in the Portland Harbor Superfund site north of downtown involves chemicals buried in the riverbank and river-bottom. The [Oregon Health Authority recently put it this way](#): “Swallowing or touching chemical contaminants in water, beach sediment, and bottom sediment at other beaches is *not* expected to harm the health of people who recreate (i.e., boat, swim, beach comb, etc.) or work within the Portland Harbor Superfund Site.”

Playing It Safe—Still the Best Bet

Like all other water bodies, recreating in the Willamette is as safe as you make it. River users need to be aware of water conditions (slippery or steep banks; drop-offs, tides [the river’s tidal all the way up to Oregon City], swift currents); other users (being visible to motor boaters, big ocean-going ships); and regulations (off-limit areas like some busy docks or boat ramps; trespassing; park hours; etc.). Recreators also need to take personal responsibility for safe behavior (knowing how to swim; using pfd’s; sobriety; courtesy; etc.).

Finally, one of the biggest concerns for safe recreation on any water body is how much *E. coli* is present. These bacteria indicate the presence of fecal matter. By stopping most sewage discharges into the Willamette, Portland’s Big Pipe project resulted in a huge decrease in *E. Coli*. But there are other sources, including birds, rodents, pets, livestock, humans and other warm-blooded animals. Therefore, it’s always a good idea to double-check before getting into the river. Portland’s Environmental Services keeps track of *E. coli* and posts its sampling results for eight Portland sites on its [regularly-updated website](#). In 2012, there were only a few times when individual samples suggested an *E. coli* problem—and these occurred in fall or winter.

Questions?

Visit the City of Portland’s Rivers Office website for more information about river conditions, history, and activities—including how we can all work together to keep the Willamette moving on the road to improved health: www.portlandonline.com/river.