

Strategies for ensuring global consistency/comparability of water-quality data

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In the past 20 years the water quality of the United States has improved remarkably—the waters are safer for drinking, swimming, and fishing. However, despite many accomplishments, it is still difficult to answer such basic questions as: “How clean is the water?” and “How is it changing over time?” These same questions exist on a global scale as well.

In order to focus water-data issues in the United States, a national Intergovernmental Task Force on Monitoring Water Quality (ITFM) was initiated for public and private organizations, whereby key elements involved in data collection, analysis, storage, and management could be made consistent and comparable. The ITFM recommended and its members are implementing a nationwide strategy to improve water-quality monitoring, assessment, and reporting activities.

The intent of this paper is to suggest that a voluntary effort be initiated to ensure the comparability and utility of hydrological data on a global basis. Consistent, long-term data sets that are comparable are necessary in order to formulate ideas regarding regional and global trends in water quantity and quality. The author recommends that a voluntary effort similar to the ITFM effort be utilized. The strategy proposed would involve voluntary representation from countries and international organizations (e.g. World Health Organization) involved in drinking-water assessments and/or ambient water-quality monitoring. Voluntary partnerships such as this will improve curability to reduce health risks and achieve a better return on public and private investments in monitoring, environmental protection, and natural resource management, and result in a collaborative process that will save millions of dollars.

Community based water quality control

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A project of technology transfer of water quality control practices was instituted between two remote Indian communities: the Cree Nation from Split Lake in the north of Canada, and the Mapuche People in the south of Chile. The subject was an initiative from Canadian and Chilean researchers, funded by IDRC, Canada.