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Published on August 3rd, 2009

## Study: Pollution Causing Cancer in Animals

by [Amanda Wills](#)

A recent report published in July's *Nature Reviews Cancer* reveals the consequences of improper disposal and dumping. According to "[Wildlife Cancer: a conservation perspective](#)," scientists are now concerned about humans' contribution to carcinogenesis in wild animal habitats.

"The more we contaminate the environment, the more we will see problems. If you dump a pollutant, it doesn't just go away," Frances Gulland, director of veterinary science at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito, Calif., [tells](#)

[Newsweek.](#)



"I am concerned that we as humans continue to impact the environment quite significantly," says Denise McAloose, the report's lead author and chief pathologist for the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) Global Health Program. Photo: Pushpullbar.com

According to Gulland, the problem is shockingly evident in the famous barking male sea lions on San Francisco's Pier 39. She says she periodically receives calls about crippling tumors on the sea lions, and 17 percent of these sea lions die of renal failure or paralysis.

The tumors are linked to Otarine herpesvirus-1, and the sea lions that died of genital carcinoma had an 85 percent higher concentration of toxic polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), a compound used in coolants and electrical transformers.

But PCBs aren't the only killer in this scenario. Scientists also found a high concentration of DDT in the blubber of the cancerous sea lions, many of whom were born near the Channel Islands. While DDT was banned from pesticides in 1972, 1,700 tons of the chemical were dumped near these islands before being outlawed.

The report also highlights the impact of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) on the Beluga whale population of Canada's St. Lawrence Estuary. PAHs are toxic compounds stemming from the incomplete burning of anything carbon-based. They are often found in aluminum smelter stacks, which, interestingly enough, line the banks of the Saguenay River which flows into the estuary.

While these specific situations were the result of industrial chemical dumping, the study is a lesson in proper disposal. Household hazardous waste can be harmful to living things, the environment and to the people handling them if they are not disposed of properly. This means [HHW](#) should not be dumped on the ground, down the drain or thrown in the trash.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Americans generate 1.6 million tons of HHW per year. The average home alone at any one time can accumulate as much as 100 pounds of HHW in basements, garages, under the sink and in storage closets.



### **Amanda Wills**

Amanda Wills is the Assistant Editor of Earth911.com

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