

A study of the occurrence and distribution of pesticide compounds in surface water of the highly urbanized Santa Ana Basin, California, was done as part of the U.S. Geological Survey's National Water-Quality Assessment Program (NAWQA). One-hundred and forty-eight samples were collected from 23 sites, and analyzed for pesticide compounds during the study period from November 1998 to September 2001. Sixty-six different pesticide compounds were detected at varying frequencies and concentrations, and one or more pesticides were detected in 92 percent of the samples. All pesticide concentrations were below maximum levels permitted in drinking water. However, two compounds—diazinon and diuron—exceeded nonenforceable drinking water health-advisory levels in at least one stream sample, and five compounds exceeded guidelines to protect aquatic life—carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, diazinon, lindane, and malathion. Twenty-two pesticide compounds were detected in at least 25 percent of the samples collected from any one fixed site. These are identified as major pesticide compounds and are emphasized in this report. The degree to which pesticides were used in the basin, as well as their physical-chemical properties, are important explanatory factors in stream pesticide occurrence, and most pesticides probably enter streams with urban runoff. Stormflow substantially increases urban runoff, and storm effects on stream pesticide concentrations sometimes persist for several days or weeks after the storm. Water sources other than urban runoff also deliver pesticide compounds to surface water in the basin. For example, atrazine may enter streams in gaining reaches where ground water carries high loads as a result of historical use in the basin. Also, the data suggest that lindane, and perhaps bromacil, are present in treated wastewater, the predominant source of water to streams in the Santa Ana Basin.

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