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Background

Marine life in Hood Canal is at risk. Fish and other bottom-dwelling creatures rely on dissolved oxygen in the deep water to breathe and survive. Levels of dissolved oxygen in the deep water of Hood Canal have declined during the past several years.

What are the water quality concerns?

In recent years, Hood Canal has suffered from lengthening periods of low dissolved oxygen, resulting in significant fish kills during 2002 and 2003. Recreational and commercial fisheries are currently closed in Hood Canal for halibut, lingcod, herring, smelt, squid and octopus.

What are the causes of low dissolved oxygen?

Scientists are currently studying the causes of low dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal. Research to date

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Hood Canal

indicates that many factors may be contributing, including:

- Circulation and flushing of the Canal. Water circulation in Hood Canal is poor because the canal has a sill in the north end that restricts water flow.
- Stratification or layering of Canal waters. Physical mixing usually distributes the oxygen bubbles from the air to the deeper water below. Surface and deeper water mix poorly in Hood Canal due to river, ocean and local processes.
- Input of nutrients that cause algae to grow. The algae bloom dies, sinks to the bottom and robs valuable oxygen from marine life. Human nutrient sources and sources from the ocean contribute to the problem. Human nutrient sources include failing on-site sewage systems, inadequate animal waste management, storm water runoff and decomposing animal and plant matter.

What is being done?

Many federal, state and local agencies, along with concerned citizens, are leading the effort to understand and fix the problem. Mason County Environmental Health is assessing the problem with a pollution identification and correction project along the Hood Canal in Mason County.

Mason County Environmental Health will:

- Perform a shoreline survey to collect samples of drainages entering Mason County's Hood Canal Shoreline.
- Investigate drainages with fecal pollution and identify and



correct fecal pollution sources.

- Sample fecal contaminated drainages for nutrient pollution to determine if correction of fecal sources leads to less nutrients in shoreline discharges.
- Conduct neighborhood water quality workshops to help property owners get the most life possible from on-site sewage systems, and learn how to reduce nutrient contamination in Hood Canal