

DIGITAL JOURNAL

India's Bellandur Lake is a real environmental 'horror story'

By [Karen Graham](#) Oct 8, 2015 in [Environment](#)

[Bangalore](#) - India's Bellandur Lake used to supply water to over 20 villages in the 1970s, but now it would be a stretch to even call it a lake. Other words come to mind, cesspool, toxic brew, or even chemical dump describes it better.

Bellandur Lake lies to the southeast of India's third largest city, Bangalore, home to 8.4 million people. The lake is the largest in the city, and as part of the [Bellandur drainage system](#), it drains the southern and the southeastern parts of the city.

The lake receives water from a chain of three lakes upstream, and forms a catchment of about 148 square kilometres (37,000 acres). Waters from Bellandur Lake flow east to Varthur Lake, eventually reaching the Pinakani river basin downstream.

By the 1980s, unchecked industrial, residential and commercial development led to insufficient rainwater reaching the lake. By the 1990s, Information Technology companies had moved in, making Bangalore a carbon copy of California's Silicon Valley. This has added to the decline of the lake. But what really signaled the death of the lake was the unchecked dumping of construction debris, chemical waste and raw sewage into and around the shores of the lake.



A real foam bath.
Sanjith Shetty

With the lake being within the city, what may have started out as a pleasant place to take the family is today, a fenced in body of water so toxic, it causes [skin rashes and burns the eyes](#). The lake is covered in foam most of the time because the toxic water contains very high levels of ammonia and phosphorus and is oxygen-depleted.

During heavy monsoonal rains, the foam washed onto the road ringing the lake, causing traffic to pile up and releasing a terrible stench. And every once in a while, because of the grease, oil, and detergents in the foam, the lake catches fire.



Varthur Lake, which gets water from Bellandur Lake is also polluted.

Media Space

“Every time it rains and the water flows, the froth raises and navigating this stretch becomes risky,” Vishruth, a resident who lives about 30 metres away from the lake, told the [NewIndianExpress](#). “Due to the froth, visibility is reduced and the area also smells bad.”

Three weeks ago, Sanchita Jha, a techie living in [Bangalore](#), started a petition online at ‘Change.org’ demanding the lake be cleaned up. So far, there are over 15,000 signatures. She explained that there is no aquatic life left in the lake, the wetlands that used to surround the lake are gone, as is much of the wildlife.

Sanchita also tells the story of two students from the university who went to the lake to get samples of water for testing. Both students ended up with skin rashes and severe vomiting after being near the lake for about 30 minutes.

“The samples showed extremely high levels of E. coli. While the optimum range for E. coli is less than 100, Bellandur lake’s water has it in the range of 717-916,” she said. “The normal range for Phosphates is 0.2, but the figure has touched 2.6. That is how bad it is,” Sanchita says.



Foam on fire - Bellandur Lake on Sept. 26, 2012. Can you imagine how toxic the smoke was?

Rajish P

Back in June, software executive and environmental activist Nagesh Aras [told the LATimes](#) that disaster is looming if urgent action isn't taken. Nagesh said that the lake is so volatile that throwing a lit cigarette into the foam can cause a fire.

In 2011, the Karnataka state government, which includes Bangalore, set up a task force to study the pollution of Bellandur Lake and come up with some solutions. The task force report said Bangalore had become "a land of a thousand sewage tanks."



Construction debris, raw sewage and chemical waste is dumped into and around the shores of Bellandur Lake, and city officials are aware of this happening.

CityOfLake

In an interview, T.V. Ramachandra, one of the city's leading environmental scientists said, "Because regulatory agencies are weak and don't have much power or staff, all the polluters are taking advantage. For the last four decades, we are paying the price."

People have little faith in the [government's commitment](#) to clean up the lake. "We need to change course, but it's like trying to turn the Titanic around," said Nagesh Aras, a software executive and environmental activist. "There's an iceberg ahead, but the captain hasn't even seen it. And that's the tragedy with the fires. We're trying to explain that they're just the tip of the iceberg."

Read more: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/environment/india-s-bellandur-lake-is-a-real-environmental-horror-story/article/446008#ixzz3oLscqwlq>