



AS IT IS

Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo Is Getting More Polluted

August 20, 2023

Fishermen who work on Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo say fish stocks are decreasing as pollution grows worse.

Lake Maracaibo is 600 kilometers west of Venezuela's capital Caracas. It is a center of Venezuela's oil production.

But environmentalists say it is becoming a polluted wasteland. They blame too much oil exploration, poor **maintenance**, outdated **infrastructure** and a lack of waste treatment systems.

There are thousands of kilometers of pipelines under the lake and oil leaks take place often.

The lake is fed by many rivers and streams. But it also receives wastewater from Zulia, Mérida and Trujillo states, where 5.3 million people live. Waste from the most distant state of Norte de Santander also **drains** into the lake.

Beltrán Briceño teaches at the University of Zulia and is head of the research laboratory in the town of Maracaibo. He said fertilizers, human waste and other chemicals flow into Lake Maracaibo. This leads to high concentrations of nitrogen and phosphorus. These substances support the growth of cyanobacteria, which can have poisonous effects on water animals and humans. Cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, are linked with mass fish deaths.

Jose Aular is a 61-year-old fisherman. He said fish do not come near the **shore** because of the algae. He also said the water has caused his skin to become unhealthy with a **rash**.

In the early 1900s, Lake Maracaibo was the heart of Venezuela's oil industry. Environmentalists say the pollution worsened in the early 1930s, when a canal was dug and connected the lake with the Caribbean Sea. The project permitted large oil tankers to **navigate** the lake but also let seawater into the lake. This killed some freshwater life.

Yordi Vicuña is a 33-year-old fisherman. He said that in the past, "you could go out fishing and catch 700 (kilograms) of shrimp." But now, he said, it takes fishermen several days to catch only eight kilograms of shrimp.

Fishermen avoid using their nets because they fear they will be damaged. Crude oil covers boats and damages fishing nets and boat motors, Vicuña said.

Briceño said many years of worsening pollution are being felt near the lakeshore with bad smells, oil slicks and poisonous algae.

Briceño warned, "There is no **magic formula**" to rescue the lake if people continue to pollute it.

I'm Mario Ritter, Jr.

Ariana Cubillos and Juan Pablo Arreaz reported this story for the Associated Press. Mario Ritter, Jr. adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

maintenance -n. the act of keeping property and equipment in good condition

infrastructure -v. structures and systems necessary for modern life like roads, bridges, power stations and other things

drain -v. the action of liquid flowing to a lower place

shore -n. the land next to a body of water

rash -n. a skin condition caused by disease or health problem

magic formula –expression something that solves a big problem but that is probably not real

We want to hear from you.

Here is how our comment system works:

1. *Write your comment in the box.*
2. *Under the box, you can see four images for social media accounts. They are for Disqus, Facebook, Twitter and Google.*
3. *Click on one image and a box appears. Enter the login for your social media account. Or you may create one on the Disqus system. It is the blue circle with “D” on it. It is free.*

Each time you return to comment on the Learning English site, you can use your account and see your comments and replies to them. Our comment policy is [here](#).
