



## Lawsuit accuses EPA of not protecting Pacific

**What's causing massive die-off of oysters in Puget Sound? Ocean water is acidifying as it absorbs more carbon pollution, and a conservation group says the EPA is not doing enough to stop it.**

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October 16, 2013**

A conservation group sued the Environmental Protection Agency on Wednesday, saying it's not protecting seawater in Oregon and Washington from acidification that's killing oysters and threatening other sea life.

The lawsuit challenges the EPA's decision that seawater in the Pacific Northwest meets water-quality standards meant to protect marine life.



(Photo: Scott Eklund, Red Box Pictures, for USA TODAY)

The water is becoming more acidic because it's absorbing more of the heat-trapping carbon pollution that's largely responsible for global warming.

As a result, the ocean is losing the chemicals that marine animals need to build protective shells and skeletons. Within the past decade, shellfish hatcheries in Washington and Oregon have experienced massive die-offs of oyster larvae as oysters fail to reproduce. Corals are more sluggish, and plankton have thin, weak shells.

"Our oceans are taking a deadly turn," Miyoko Sakashita, oceans director for the non-profit, Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity, said in filing the lawsuit. Without swift action, he said, problems will intensify, and "we'll realize how much we all depend on the ocean."

In its year-long series on climate change, USA TODAY has looked at the impact of increasingly corrosive seawater along the West Coast and the inlets of Puget Sound, a center of the \$111 million shellfish industry in the Pacific.

The Clean Water Act requires that water failing quality standards, including those for acidity, be identified as "impaired" and subject to pollution control such as measures to reduce carbon emissions. The lawsuit says using this law to address ocean acidification complements EPA efforts, such as proposing limits on CO2 emissions from new power plants, under the Clean Air Act.

The EPA, which has furloughed more than 90% of its employees because of the government shutdown, did not provide a requested comment on the lawsuit.