As gasoline stations grew common in the 1950s, gasoline full of toxics began leaking from corroded tanks into the groundwater, then into the Bay — an ongoing, sometimes hidden, problem.

Sources of Pollution over the last few hundred years, many industries have come and gone in Casco Bay and Portland Harbor, leaving behind long-lasting pollutants that remain trapped in sediments at the Bay's bottom. While the Clean Water Act of 1972 helped end these "point source" polluters, challenges to keeping the Bay healthy still remain.

A Dirty History of Casco Bay

By the summer of 1866, Portland was the largest commercial shipping port in the nation. Industries sprouted up everywhere. Much of their waste was simply dumped into rivers, streams, and directly into the Bay.

Few realized we were creating a toxic stew that would someday endanger the health of the Bay's ecosystems and threaten to destroy fish, clams, and the livelihoods of those dependent upon the Bay and Estuary.

The coal dust from the harbor was so thick we had to sweep up the mess every single morning.

During the 1950s and 60s when the weather was warm, the Bay smelled awful. Even on hot days, you didn't want to go into the water for fear you'd get sick from swimming.

Dollars of factories and foundries poured heavy metals, cyanide, arsenic, and powerful acids into Casco Bay. Shipyards used copper and toxic paints which also ended up in the Bay.

During the 1950s and 60s when the weather was warm, the Bay smelled awful. Even on hot days, you didn't want to go into the water for fear you'd get sick from swimming.