

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Characterisation of storm runoff contamination from a tropical urban residential area in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

It has been quite a long time since the Malaysian government endorsed the Urban Storm Water Management Manual (USWMM) in 2000. Until now, there is no proper and detailed database on the non-point source contamination characteristics from various land uses in tropical regions of Malaysia. As such this study was conducted to fill part of the information gap pertaining to the nature of runoff quality in the tropical regions. The combined sewer outfall of a 6.14 ha residential area in Malaysia was studied to characterise the urban runoff quality generated due to tropical rain. As the drainage outlet discharges sullage and storm runoff through the same drainage network, hourly flow pattern and contaminant concentrations were determined both for sullage and storm runoff. Basic statistical analysis was conducted to determine the mean, standard deviation and event mean concentration values for the study area, for which such data was not available. It was observed that the runoff generated from the area is polluted due to high total suspended solids (TSS), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) and chemical oxygen demand (COD). The runoff contained more total organic carbon (TOC) than total inorganic carbon (TIC). The EMC values of BOD, COD, TSS, TOC, total Kjeldhal nitrogen, ammoniacal nitrogen and orthophosphate were 35, 168, 177, 11, 0.32, 0.54, 0.16 mg/L, respectively. The presence of heavy metals in the runoff was low. The EMC values of lead, zinc, nickel, cadmium, chromium and copper were 0.061, 0.358, 0.002, 0.002, 0.025 and 0.022 mg/L, respectively. Due to the high quantity of rainfall, a significant amount of annual contamination loading is generated from the nonpoint sources of the residential area.

**Keywords:** event mean concentration (EMC); non-point source contamination; contamination loading; residential area; tropical area; urban runoff quality

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## 1. Introduction

The water resources are contaminated by the point and nonpoint (diffuse) sources of urban land use. Point sources of contamination are usually noticeable, confined, and the estimation of the contamination load into the waterbodies is comparatively easy. On the contrary, nonpoint sources are unconfined and it is difficult to estimate and capture the pollutants to reduce water contamination problems. The main driving force of diffuse contamination is storm runoff. For the same land use and housekeeping practices, more runoff means more contamination load. Due to frequent storm events and high annual

rainfall, tropical regions have a higher susceptibility to diffuse contamination.

There is not much information available on diffuse pollutant loads due to storm runoff in tropical urban areas nonpoint contamination in urban areas is quite complex in nature and has been classified as land cover-related (buildings and infrastructure), activity-related (e.g., transport emissions), behaviour-related (e.g., pesticide and fertiliser use), plus atmospheric deposition<sup>[1]</sup>. It has been observed that in urban areas, even with good housekeeping practices, a significant amount of contamination is generated from the road surfaces and is a constant threat to the declining water quality of receiving water bodies<sup>[2-5]</sup>.

Besides the increased runoff, urbanisation produces inferior quality stormwater with higher amounts of pollutants such as sediments, debris, tire dust and petroleum-based fluids (vehicle-based pollutants) resulting from runoff over paved surfaces like roofs of buildings, driveways, parking lots, sidewalks and streets<sup>[6,7]</sup>. Pollutant concentration in stormwater is very site-specific and largely dependent upon several factors such as rainfall intensities<sup>[8]</sup>, cleanliness and other anthropogenic activities within the catchment<sup>[9]</sup>. In a detailed literature review regarding the composition of urban runoff, Loehr<sup>[10]</sup> highlighted a wide variation in pollutant concentration. For instance, mean and maximum BOD values ranged between 12–160 mg/L and 18–7700 mg/L respectively.

Studies on storm runoff composition in the USA indicated that stormwater is alarmingly more hazardous than treated sewage<sup>[11]</sup>. The reason is that improved technologies are applied for industrial waste and sewage treatment but the contamination arising from storm runoff is not seriously being taken care of, even in most of the urban areas. Generally, priorities were given to the minimisation of flood problems rather than the control of diffuse contamination.

Malaysia is one of the fastest-growing developing countries in the world. Since it is located in the tropics, Malaysia receives an annual average rainfall between 1700 and 4000 mm<sup>[12]</sup>. The resulting runoff carries a wide range of pollutants from various land uses. Depending on the land uses, almost 60% of the total pollutants may be entering the rivers as a runoff<sup>[13]</sup>. Progress in stormwater management practices for controlling nonpoint source contamination (NPS) is still in the initial stage in Malaysia. Even the event mean concentration (EMC) values or the pollutant export equations, which are the basic requirement for stormwater quality assessment and control, are not available for the Malaysian climate. The studies reported to be conducted in Malaysia were related to runoff quality from roofs<sup>[14,15]</sup>. The Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) and local authorities have begun to control the runoff rate and the associated diffused pollutants. Unfortunately supporting data and research works from the local institutions are very scarce.

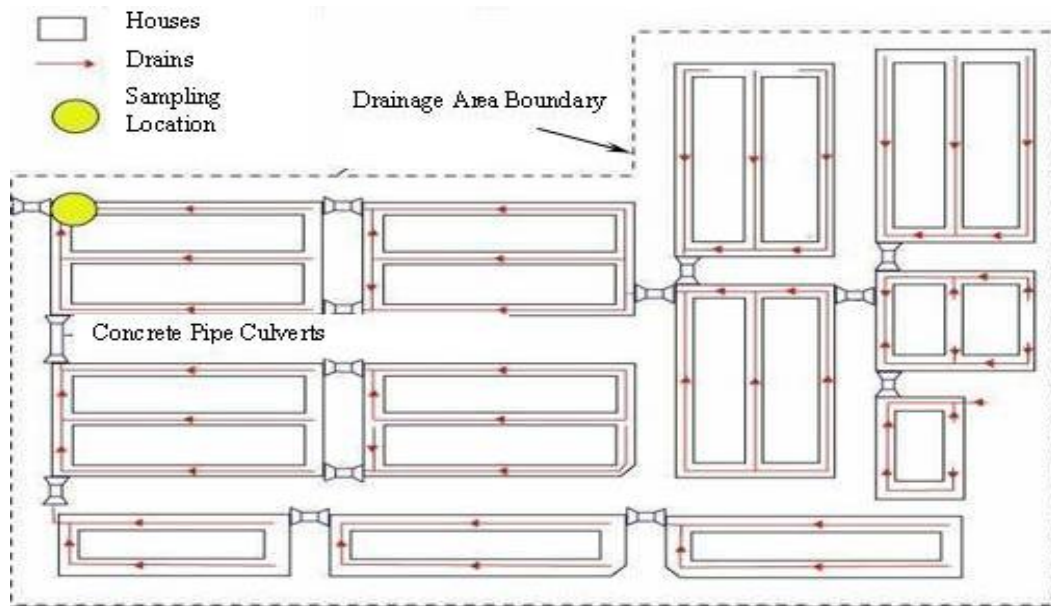
All relevant studies demonstrate that receiving water bodies are polluted due to urban storm runoff significantly. After the Nationwide Urban Runoff Program (NURP) in 1983, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) identified that industrial areas are more polluted than residential areas. Being a fast-developing country, a similar situation may exist in Malaysia, but this is not revealed yet. Residential areas cover the majority portion of the total urban land use. As such, this study was conducted to collect data through scientifically sound methods to characterise the runoff quality from an urban residential area, where the annual average rainfall is about 2500 mm/year.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Study area

The catchment area for the storm runoff contamination study consists of 6.14 ha of urban area with a mixture of green space, which is close to the University Putra Malaysia (UPM) located in the State of Selangor. The study area was developed in 1981 for 283 units of single-story terrace houses where the calculated population was 1415 residents. A network of open concrete drains carries stormwater and sullage (grey

wastewater) all the way to a small tributary of Kuyoh River. The samples for sullage and storm runoff were collected from the drainage outlet of the catchment area as shown in **Figure 1**. The catchment was found to be ideal to conduct such a contamination study, which is neither too small nor too big.



**Figure 1.** The layout of the drainage system (not to scale).

## 2.2. Field visits and laboratory work

The drainage pattern with layouts and the boundary of the catchment area were determined, as shown in **Figure 1**. The study area was also thoroughly investigated to make sure that discharge from adjacent commercial plots does not enter the selected catchment area. A level survey was carried out to determine the slope of the outlet culvert and the discharge was computed using Manning's formula. The measured discharges and depths of water of the outlet culvert (Diameter 1.23 m) were used to calibrate Manning roughness "n". The depth of the water level was recorded every minute by the water level recorder attached to the ISCO water sampler.

As the combined sewer system also conveys domestic sullage, samples were collected in four aliquots of 250 mL at an interval of 15 minutes to prepare hourly composite sullage. The samplings were done for one working day and weekends (Saturday and Sunday) to characterise the quantity and quality of sullage to determine the flow and pollutant patterns to be used as the base data. Although naturally and in reality, the flow and concentration data will not be the same every day and every moment; it is acceptable to assume that the observed data will represent the usual characteristics of the sullage data in that area. Seventy-two samples were collected in three days from the catchment outlet (**Figure 1**) and analysis for sullage quality was performed in the laboratory at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). The sullage concentration was deducted from the combined quality of wastewater during storm events to compute the surface runoff quality.

Three storm events of various rainfall amounts (9.7, 47.1 and 54.8 mm) were sampled to study pollutographs during rainy days. For each storm event, 24 samples were collected from the drainage outlet. Non-uniform sampling intervals were chosen to cover the whole runoff hydrograph. During rainy days, the first 10 samples were collected at 1-minute intervals, the next 9 samples at 3-minute and the rest 5 samples at 5-minute intervals. Ice was placed inside the autosampler in order to minimise the degradation of sample properties. Twenty common pollutants (Appendix A) were tested in this study, using the standard methods<sup>[16]</sup>, calibrated sensors, probes or instruments. However, the results on the runoff flow rate, TSS, BOD, COD, Pb, Zn and Cu are presented in this work.

### 2.3. Analytical method

Basic statistical analysis was conducted to determine certain values, as generally required for such studies. The event mean concentration (*EMC*) was calculated by dividing the total pollutant mass from the storm runoff by the total runoff volume. As the samples during the rainy day were a mixture of sillage and stormwater, *EMC* in storm runoff (*EMC<sub>sw</sub>*) was calculated using Equation (1).

$$EMC_{sw} = \frac{\sum Q_{rd} \cdot C_{rd} - \sum Q_{dd} \cdot C_{dd}}{\sum Q_{rd} - \sum Q_{dd}} \quad (1)$$

where, the subscripts “*rd*” and “*dd*” denote the rainy day (combined sillage & stormwater) and dry day (sillage only) flows (*Q*) and concentrations (*C*), respectively. The sillage flow and concentration were measured during dry weather assuming only minor variation whereas the total flow and concentration were measured during the rain event.

### 3. Results and discussion

The data collected in the dry period indicated that during the working days, there are three peaks in sillage flow (**Figure 2**). Two mild peaks were observed during the working days, one in the morning and the other in the evening. The high peak occurred at noon every day. It was observed that both the pollutant concentrations and loading were high during the peak hours of the days (**Figures 3–5**). The daily contamination loading generated due to sillage was calculated and compared to the contamination generated from storm events (diffuse sources).

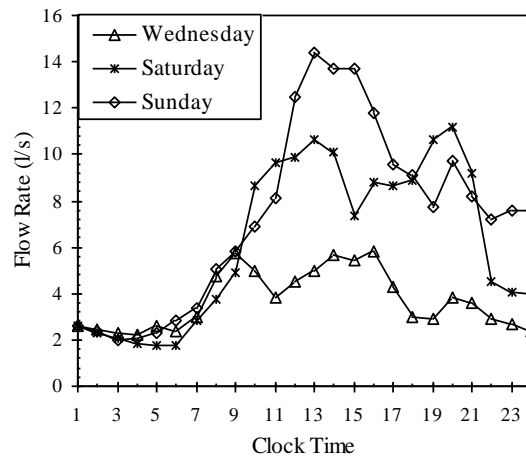


Figure 2. Variation of sillage flow with the day.

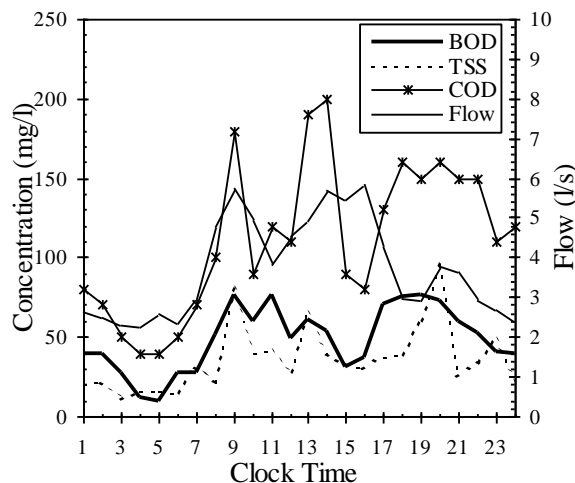


Figure 3. Variation of common pollutants in sillage (during the working day).

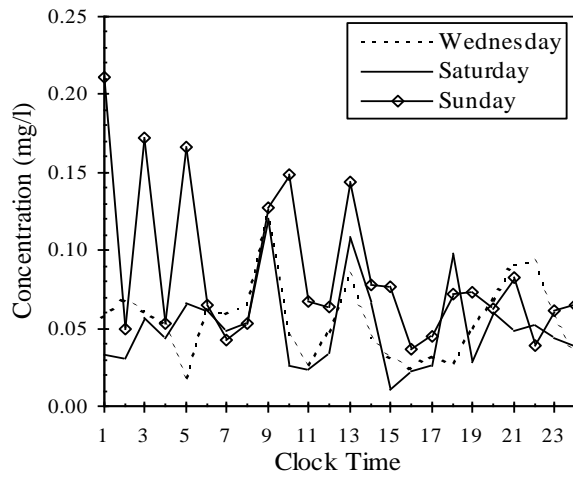


Figure 4. Variation of zinc in sullage with day.

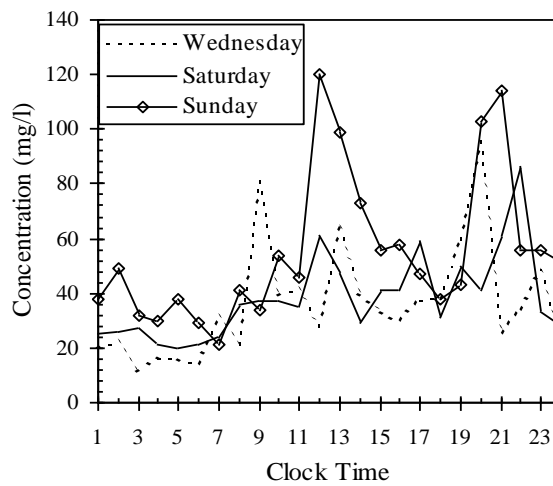


Figure 5. Variation of TSS in sullage with day.

Pollutographs were also developed to study the contamination pattern during rain events. Three storm events of various rainfall intensities were studied (Figure 6). Except for a few instances it was observed that the pollutant concentrations decreased with the increased runoff due to the dilution effect. However, in the case of TSS, higher concentrations were observed before the peak runoff (Figure 7) as pollutant wash-off is a function of the build-up of particles<sup>[17]</sup>. Therefore, TSS is the major contributor to pollutant load for the variation of water quality in different land uses.

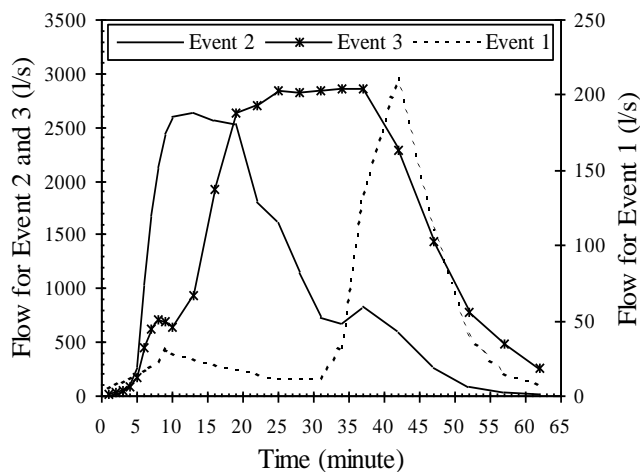
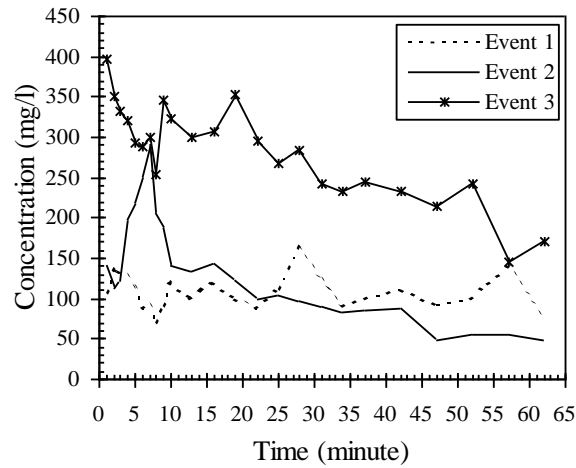
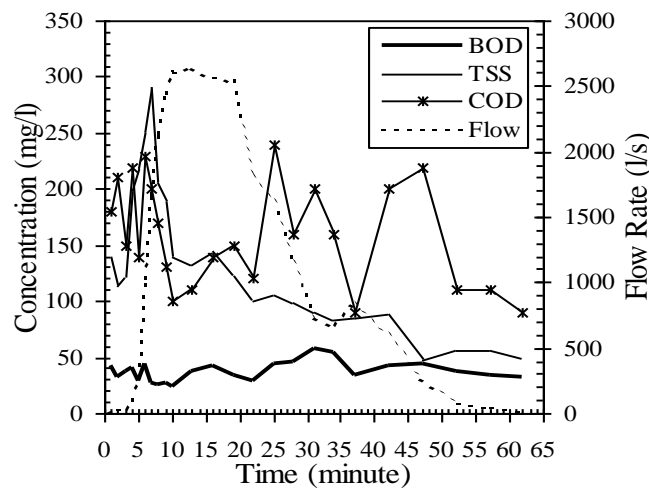


Figure 6. Runoff hydrographs of the storm events.

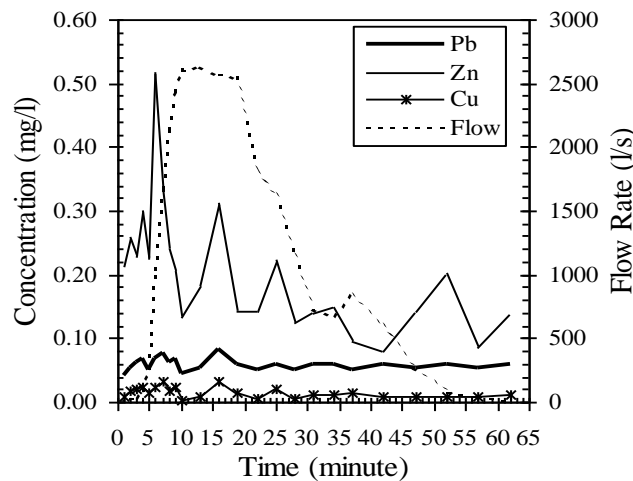
Wide variations in concentrations were observed within the same storm event, as shown in the case of COD (**Figure 8**). Higher concentrations of zinc, lead and copper were detected in the runoff as shown in **Figure 9**. The presence of dissolved organic matter (DOM) in stormwater runoff due to various land uses initiated the release and movement of heavy metals (Cd, Cu, Ni and Pb) for their binding affinities for heavy metals<sup>[18]</sup>. Loading rates for all pollutants were high during the hydrograph peaks due to the high amount of runoff rate.



**Figure 7.** Pollutographs of TSS for storm events.



**Figure 8.** Pollutograph of BOD, COD and TSS (for Event 2).



**Figure 9.** Pollutograph of Pb, Zn and Cu (for Event 2).

The statistical data of all samples on the sullage (dry day) and the runoff (rainy day) quality of the studied parameters are given in **Table 1**. It was observed that except for TSS, VSS, DO, turbidity, COD and heavy metals, the mean concentrations of other parameters were low during the storm event (as shown in **Table 1**). The event mean concentration (EMC) values indicated that the runoff from the study area was polluted, mainly, due to BOD, COD and TSS.

**Table 1.** Statistical analysis of water quality during the dry and rainy days (72 samples).

Item	Flow (L/s)	Turbidity (NTU)	pH -	TDS (mg/L)	TSS (mg/L)	VSS (mg/L)	O&G (mg/L)	DO (mg/L)	BOD (mg/L)	COD (mg/L)	AN (mg/L)	TKN (mg/L)
Dry Day												
Min	1.8	11	6.20	140	11	1	4	1.20	9	40	1.80	0.40
Max	14.4	67	6.95	347	120	32	23	2.40	78	200	9.20	4.50
Mean	5.8	35	6.67	228	43	8	14	1.55	50	116	4.90	2.08
SD	3.4	15	0.18	40	23	6	5	0.32	14	47	1.65	1.01
Rainy Day												
Min	5.5	19	5.44	15	48	4	3	1.80	21	90	0.29	0.02
Max	2865.3	98	6.54	140	397	234	13	5.93	59	310	2.18	1.86
Mean	803.5	46	6.13	56	173	94	8	3.64	38	173	0.75	0.51
SD	1019.2	19	0.24	26	93	62	3	1.03	10	49	0.39	0.43
Item	Flow (L/s)	OP (mg/L)	TC (mg/L)	TIC (mg/L)	TOC (mg/L)	Zn (mg/L)	Pb (mg/L)	Cr (mg/L)	Cu (mg/L)	Ni (mg/L)	Cd (mg/L)	
Dry Day												
Min	1.8	0.34	14.7	0.29	7.6	0.011	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	
Max	14.4	4.13	85.0	12.25	79.9	0.211	ND	ND	0.022	ND	0.012	
Mean	5.8	2.05	41.6	6.55	35.0	0.064	ND	ND	0.009	ND	0.002	
SD	3.4	0.93	13.5	3.53	14.9	0.038	ND	ND	0.006	ND	0.002	
Rain Day												
Min	5.5	0.02	1.6	0.03	1.1	0.081	0.015	0.006	0.004	0.001	0.001	
Max	2865.3	1.18	75.3	11.18	66.1	0.736	0.099	0.051	0.051	0.013	0.005	
Mean	803.5	0.29	16.9	3.73	13.2	0.306	0.057	0.022	0.021	0.003	0.002	
SD	1019.2	0.29	15.8	3.66	13.2	0.152	0.018	0.009	0.011	0.003	0.001	

Note: ND—Not Detected.

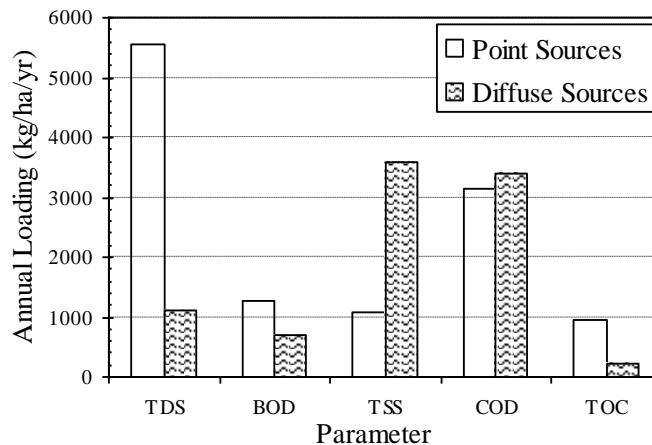
The EMC values of this study were comparable with the site median EMC values for urban areas in the USA and other urban places, as given in **Table 2**<sup>[19-26]</sup>. The EMC values for TSS, BOD and COD are close to the EMC values obtained from the study conducted by Yusop et al.<sup>[26]</sup>. EMC values for BOD and COD varies significantly as compared to studies done in Europe and the USA because of the dissimilarities with respect to climatic, topographic and land use condition.

**Table 2.** Comparison of mean/median EMC values (mg/L) with other studies.

Pollutant	ASEAN country	Asian country <sup>[21]</sup>	The USA	EU country <sup>[20]</sup>	Malaysia <sup>[26]</sup>	This study
TSS	31.9 <sup>[19]</sup>	367.19	190 <sup>[25]</sup>	27	184	177
BOD	72 <sup>[24]</sup>	-	9 <sup>[22]</sup>	9	39	35
COD	325 <sup>[24]</sup>	302.81	413 <sup>[22]</sup>	65	131.9	168
Zn	0.06 <sup>[19]</sup>	0.229	0.13 <sup>[25]</sup>	0.16	0.18	0.358
Pb	0.01 <sup>[19]</sup>	0.003	-	0.144	0.01	0.061
Cu	0.01 <sup>[19]</sup>	0.024	0.023 <sup>[23]</sup>	0.034	0.13	0.022

The study on the Rouge River basin<sup>[27]</sup> indicated that, compared to the point sources, the annual loading of heavy metals resulting from direct runoff governed the river loadings with lead at 84.3% and zinc at 68.6%. The total suspended solids (TSS), BOD, total nitrogen and total phosphorus from stormwater were (relatively less) 34.5, 43.8, 41.7 and 37.7%, respectively. TSS and COD vary significantly<sup>[21]</sup> when compared with the present study due to the urban setup and colder climate that exists in the study area of China.

The rainfall data was collected from the weather station operated by the University Putra Malaysia (UPM). The mean annual rainfall was calculated at 2387 mm. Annual contamination loadings from point and nonpoint sources were calculated, respectively, based on the sullage quantity and quality and the annual rainfall and EMC values. The annual sullage and runoff quantity, for the residential area, were calculated at 91,454 m<sup>3</sup><sup>[28]</sup> and 124,578 m<sup>3</sup>, respectively. From the analysis of annual loading, it was found that TSS (77%), VSS (90%), COD (52%) and heavy metals (81%) were contributed more from the diffuse sources (due to storm runoff). Whereas other pollutants monitored in this study were contributed more from sullage (point contamination sources). The annual contamination loading rate (in kg/ha/yr) for the residential area was calculated and shown in **Figure 10**.

**Figure 10.** Water quality parameter for point and diffuse sources (importantly pollutants only).

## 4. Conclusions

A 6.14-ha urban residential area was studied to characterise the runoff quality from the diffuse contamination sources. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the pollutant concentrations in the sullage (grey water) of the study area are generally higher than those in the storm runoff. However, being in the tropical region where the annual rainfall is high (2387 mm in the study area), the annual contamination loadings from the diffuse sources for TSS, VSS, COD and heavy metals are found to be higher than the annual contribution from the sullage. The event mean concentration (EMC) values of BOD, COD, TSS, TOC, total Kjeldhal nitrogen (TKN), ammoniacal nitrogen and orthophosphate were 35, 168, 177, 11, 0.32, 0.54, 0.16



mg/L respectively. The concentration of heavy metals in the runoff was low. The EMC values of lead, zinc, nickel, cadmium, chromium and copper were 0.061, 0.358, 0.002, 0.002, 0.025 and 0.022 mg/L, respectively. The other pollutants monitored in this study were contributed more from the point contamination sources. The pollutant concentration and loading of heavy metals from the study area are not significant. Due to high pollutant concentration, the sillage and runoff both need to be treated before being discharged into the water bodies.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization, AAM and AI; methodology, AAM; formal analysis, AAM and AI; investigation, AAM and SS; resources, AI and SS; data curation, AAM and WNAS; original draft preparation, AAM; review and editing, SS; supervision, AI; project administration, AAM. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## **Appendix A: List of pollutants monitored in this study**

- 1) pH
- 2) Dissolved Oxygen (DO)
- 3) Turbidity
- 4) Total Dissolved Solids (TDS)
- 5) Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD)
- 6) Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)
- 7) Total Suspended Solids (TSS)
- 8) Volatile Suspended Solids (VSS)
- 9) Total Organic Carbon (TOC)
- 10) Total Inorganic Carbon (TIC)
- 11) Total Carbon (TC)
- 12) Total Kjeldhal Nitrogen (TKN)
- 13) Ammoniacal Nitrogen (AN)
- 14) Ortho Phosphate (OP)
- 15) Total Lead (Pb)
- 16) Total Zinc (Zn)
- 17) Total Copper (Cu)
- 18) Total Nickel (Ni)
- 19) Total Cadmium (Cd)
- 20) Total Chromium (Cr)