Secchi Disk Encyclopedia Article

Secchi Disk

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Secchi Disk

A simple instrument used to measure the transparency of surface water bodies such as lakes and reservoirs. A Secchi disk is a metal, plastic, or wooden disk that is 8–12 in (20–30 cm) in diameter. It may be white or have alternating black and white quadrants. A long calibrated rope is attached to the center of the disk. Researchers use the disk by lowering it into the water, usually from the shaded side of a boat, and measuring the depth at which it just disappears from sight. The disk is then lowered a little more and then raised until it reappears. The average of the depths at which the disk disappears and then reappears is known as the Secchi depth. The amount of **sediment**, algae, and other solids in the water affects clarity and depth of light penetration and thus, Secchi depth. Scientists use this measure of transparency as a simple indication of **water quality**, often by comparing Secchi depth measurements over a period of time to track changes in the clarity of a particular water body.



Testing water clarity with a secchi disk. (Photograph by W.A. Banaszewski. Visuals Unlimited. Reproduced by permission.)