

**nitrogen (N)**

Essential chemical element and nutrient for all life forms; molecular formula ( $N_2$ ), constitutes 78 percent of the atmosphere by volume; nitrogen is present in surface water and groundwater as ammonia ( $NH_3$ ), nitrite ( $NO_2^-$ ), nitrate ( $NO_3^-$ ), and organic nitrogen; excess levels of nitrogen in marine areas may contribute to eutrophication; see also ammonia nitrogen, ammonium nitrogen, nitrate nitrogen, nitrate; nitrite nitrogen and organic nitrogen.