



MARINE DEBRIS



Marine debris is a problem along shorelines, and in coastal waters, estuaries, and oceans throughout the world. Marine debris is any man-made, solid material that enters our waterways either directly or indirectly. Marine debris enters our oceans and coasts from a number of land- and ocean-based sources. More people move near our Nation's coasts each year, and the production of trash and the potential for marine debris continues to increase. We need to better control the disposal of trash and other wastes, or we will continue to find marine debris in our rivers, streams, and oceans.

Reducing marine debris means reducing the amount of waste generated on land and at sea, and disposing of it properly.

Volunteer coastal cleanups and public education efforts can help reduce the amount of debris in our waterways and coastlines.

In 2008, over 183,000 people across the U.S. participated in beach cleanups. These cleanup efforts removed almost four million pounds of debris from more than 9,000 miles of coasts, shorelines, and underwater sites.

Recycling and proper disposal can significantly reduce the amounts of marine debris reaching oceans and coastal waters.

A great deal more can be done. You can be part of the solution.

WHAT IS MARINE DEBRIS?

- Marine debris is trash and other solid material that enters oceans and coastal waters and often ends up on our beaches. It is also known as litter.
- Common types of marine debris include plastic bags, bottles and cans, cigarette filters, bottle caps, and lids.

WHERE DOES MARINE DEBRIS COME FROM?

- When trash is not recycled or properly thrown away on land, it can become marine debris. For example, trash in the streets can wash into sewers, storm drains, or inland rivers and streams when it rains and can be carried to oceans and coastal waters.
- People who go to the beach sometimes leave behind trash.
- Recreational and commercial fishermen sometimes lose or discard large fishing nets and lines in the ocean.
- Ships and recreational boats at sea sometimes intentionally or accidentally dump trash directly into the ocean. Trash from boats may be thrown, dropped, or blown overboard.

WHAT DOES MARINE DEBRIS DO TO THE ENVIRONMENT?

- Trash on the beach can be harmful to the health and safety of beach users. It also makes the beach look ugly and dirty. Dirty beaches discourage visitors and cause local beach communities to lose money from tourism or to spend money on cleanup efforts.
- Many types of animals, like seals, sea turtles, birds, fish, and crabs, can be wounded, strangled, or unable to swim if they consume or become entangled in marine debris.
- Marine animals can swallow marine debris causing suffocation or starvation. Sea birds have been known to swallow small plastic pieces (which look like fish eggs); and sea turtles have been known to swallow clear plastic bags (which look like jellyfish).



WHAT IS EPA DOING TO PREVENT MARINE DEBRIS?

- EPA and other stakeholders support the annual International Coastal Cleanup (ICC), implemented by Ocean Conservancy. The ICC currently involves 50 U.S. states and territories and 104 countries from around the world. The ICC is the largest volunteer environmental data-gathering effort and cleanup of coastal and underwater areas in the world. Thousands of participants learn the value of preventing and controlling marine debris. The ICC takes place on the third Saturday in September every year.
- Ocean Conservancy with support from EPA recently completed the National Marine Debris Monitoring Program (NMDMP). The NMDMP was developed to standardize marine debris data collection and assess marine debris sources and trends in the U.S. NMDMP used trained volunteers to conduct monthly marine debris surveys on designated beaches over a five-year period. The NMDMP Report indicates that approximately 49 percent of the marine debris items collected nationally during the study originated from land-based sources, 18 percent from ocean-based sources, and 33 percent from general- sources (i.e., items that originate on land or at sea).
- EPA scientists have conducted numerous studies to identify types and sources of marine debris. EPA also focuses control efforts on specific sources such as street litter, storm water runoff, and industrial wastewater, and supports recycling programs.

HOW CAN I OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION?

- Visit our website at www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/debris.
- Contact the Oceans and Coastal Protection Division at 202-566-1200.

