

Working Toward Solutions

The only way to truly manage the marine debris pollution issue is through prevention – changing the behaviors that cause marine debris to enter the environment.

Consequently, multiple organizations and local, regional and state agencies are collaborating on outreach projects designed to bring awareness to and alleviate the problem of marine debris. Several efforts are focusing on



monitoring the behaviors and activities that result in marine debris and developing prevention strategies that educate people on marine debris issues, their role in the problem and how to prevent it. For more information on programs that are working to foster change, visit www.marinedebris.noaa.gov.



What You Can Do

Here are some steps that you can take to help solve the marine debris problem:

- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Choose reusable items and use fewer disposable ones.
- Retain all pieces of fishing line, net or other litter for proper disposal in trash containers.
- Keep streets, sidewalks, parking lots and storm drains free of trash – they empty into our oceans.
- Stow all trash on your boat for proper disposal on land. At the beach, park or playground, dispose of all trash in the proper receptacles or take your trash home with you. Pick up any debris you see while out.
- Serve as an example to others. Get involved in cleanups in your area and encourage others to help keep the beaches and oceans clean.

MARINE DEBRIS



Understanding and
Preventing Marine Debris



What Is Marine Debris?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines marine debris as any man-made object discarded, disposed of or abandoned that enters the coastal or marine environment.

Where Does It Come From?

While there are many types of debris, it all shares a common origin – people. People’s mishandling of waste materials and a host of other items constitutes the bulk of the marine debris problem. Researchers traditionally classify marine debris as coming from **land-** or **ocean/waterway-based** sources.

Sources of land-based debris include:

- Inappropriate disposal of trash from many land-based activities, including picnicking, beachgoing, fishing and waterside sporting events;

- Debris items from lawns, parking lots, streets, and storm drains being blown, swept or washed out to sea;
- Inappropriate handling of packaging materials;
- Inadvertent or intentional release of waste from shore-based solid waste disposal and waste processing facilities; and
- Sewage overflows.

Sources of ocean/waterway-based debris include:

- Abandoning fishing gear, including line, nets, ropes, bait boxes, fish tags and trawl floats;
- Intentional or inadvertent discharge of trash, galley waste and boating materials, including oil lube bottles, engine cleaning and maintenance products; and
- Inappropriate handling of undersea exploration and oil and gas extraction items, including hard hats, sheeting and



tarps, computer equipment and survey materials.

Impacts of Marine Debris

In addition to being unsightly, marine debris poses significant threats to ocean ecosystems, wildlife and human health and safety.

Effects on ocean ecosystems

- Abandoned nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear and other debris can smother and crush sensitive ecosystems and their bottom-dwelling species.

Effects on marine wildlife

- Fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can entangle, maim and even drown many wildlife species. Some debris looks like food to many animals. Once ingested, these materials can cause starvation and/or choking.

Effects on people

- Medical and personal hygiene debris can enter waterways when sewer systems fail or overflow. These items often contain harmful bacteria and pathogens.
- Syringes, broken glass and other hazardous items pose obvious dangers to bare-footed beachgoers.
- Grocery and trash bags, fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can wrap around boat propellers and clog seawater intakes, causing costly damage and becoming a safety hazard.