



BOATING FACTS

What Is Marine Debris?



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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. It may enter directly from a ship, or indirectly when washed out to sea via rivers, streams and storm drains. Unlike earlier generations, today's world relies heavily on synthetic materials – such as cigarette filters, food

wrappers, beverage bottles and cans, grocery and trash bags and fishing line, nets and gear – that are durable and highly buoyant. Once these items enter the ocean environment they can travel thousands of miles on ocean currents, posing a threat to ocean ecosystems and wildlife. Consequently, marine debris has become one of the most pervasive pollution problems facing the world's oceans and waterways.

Where Does It Come From?



While there are countless types of marine debris, it all shares a common origin – people. In fact, people's mishandling of waste materials and other items makes up the bulk of the marine debris problem. Most researchers traditionally classify marine debris as coming from **land-** or **ocean/waterway-based sources**.

A great deal of **land-based** marine debris reaches the ocean when people carelessly discard trash while on land. Debris is also blown into the water or carried by creeks, rivers, storm drains and sewers into the

ocean. People also generate debris while at sea. Like land-based debris, the majority of **ocean/waterway-based** debris reaches the ocean through people's failure to properly dispose of or stow their trash while onboard their boats and vessels.

Boaters contribute to the debris problem when they throw trash, such as food wrappers, beverage containers, plastic bags and fishing gear, overboard. This discarded waste can become debris with damaging – and even deadly – effects.

Impacts of Marine Debris

Marine debris is more than an eyesore: it also poses threats to boaters and the oceans and waterways that they enjoy.

Grocery and trash bags, fishing line, nets and rope can wrap around boat propellers and clog seawater intakes, causing costly engine damage and becoming a safety hazard.



Debris is also a hazard to navigation. In 2005, collisions with floating and submerged objects caused 269 boating accidents, resulting in 15 deaths, 116 injuries, and \$2.9 million in property damage.¹

Discarded fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can entangle, maim and cause many wildlife species to drown. Some debris, such as cigarette filters, small plastic pieces and grocery and trash bags, looks like food to many animals. Once ingested, these materials can cause starvation and/or choking. To date, entanglement and ingestion has been reported in at least 267 animal species worldwide.²

Abandoned nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear and other debris can smother and crush sensitive coral reef and seagrass bed ecosystems and their benthic (bottom-dwelling) species.

¹ U.S. Coast Guard, "Boating Statistics 2005," (August 2006): 27. See also http://www.auxbdept.org/BOATING-STATS_05.pdf.

² The Ocean Conservancy, "Solid Waste and Debris," Good Mate Recreational Boating and Marine Manual (2001): 35.



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Working Toward Solutions

While important, simply removing existing debris is not enough. The marine debris pollution issue can only truly be managed through prevention – changing the behavior that causes marine debris to enter the environment.

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) is an international treaty designed to address the problem of vessels dumping their waste at sea. All ships, boats, platforms, marinas and docks must comply with Annex V of this law, which prohibits the disposal of plastics anywhere in the ocean and restricts the disposal of most other types of solid waste. For more information on Annex V of MARPOL and how it relates to boaters, visit the NOAA resources guide online at www.marinedebris.noaa.gov.



***MARINE DEBRIS CAN ONLY TRULY BE MANAGED
BY CHANGING THE BEHAVIOR
THAT CAUSES IT TO ENTER THE ENVIRONMENT.***

What You Can Do

People who enjoy boating and its related activities can help reduce the amount of marine debris that enters the oceans by following these guidelines:



Boaters

- Bring ALL of your trash back to shore and collect any debris that you find in or near the water and dispose of it properly.
- Properly stow and secure all trash on your boat so that it won't be blown or washed overboard.
- Tell guests that no trash should be thrown overboard from your boat.
- Follow the marine debris regulations required by Annex V of MARPOL. Remember that it is illegal to dispose of any plastic materials in all U.S. waters and anywhere at sea.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Purchase reusable products and containers and recycle your plastic, metal, glass and paper products – including monofilament fishing line.
- Report illegal dumping to your local U.S. Coast Guard Sector Office. Call (800) 424-8802 to locate the Sector Office near you.

- Encourage your docks, marinas, fishing piers and boat ramps to provide adequate trash cans and recycling bins.
- Support environmentally responsible marinas.
- Serve as an example to others and encourage them to help keep the oceans free of debris.

Marinas

- Set up and clearly label recycling bins for staff and customers. Call your local environmental or resource management office to find out what materials can be recycled in your area.
- Encourage boaters to set up an onboard system to segregate trash for easy disposal and recycling on shore.
- Keep trash cans, dumpsters and recycling bins from overflowing by emptying them regularly. Make sure they are covered, secured and can't be opened by strong winds or animals.