



MARINE DEBRIS LEGISLATION AND POLICY



While several laws regulate litter and debris both on land and at sea, legislation does not guarantee compliance. In addition to enforce-

ment and penalties, a sense of environmental stewardship among ocean users is essential for these laws to be effective. The following are some of the major federal laws addressing marine debris. Efforts to regulate marine debris are also addressed by coastal states (including Great Lakes states) and U.S. territories and commonwealths. These coastal states have comprehensive programs to manage and balance competing uses of and impacts to coastal resources, including litter and debris.

FEDERAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT AMENDMENTS OF 1972

Established in 1972 and amended in 1977, this law became commonly known as the **Clean Water Act**, which established pollution discharge regulations for U.S. waters, set water quality standards, and gave the country's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) authority over pollution control programs. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/r5water/cwa.htm.

COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT

Established in 1972, the Coastal Zone Management Act authorizes NOAA to approve and fund state programs that regulate land-based pollution discharges and works to preserve, protect, develop, restore and enhance the United States' coastal zone resources through state coastal management planning. For more information, visit www.legislative.noaa.gov/Legislation/czma.html or www.cr.nps.gov/local_law/FHPL_CstlZoneMngmt.pdf.

MARINE PROTECTION, RESEARCH AND SANCTUARIES ACT (MPRSA)

Established in 1972, the Act gives the U.S. Coast Guard and EPA domestic authority to implement the London Convention in regulating the dumping of materials into ocean waters. This legislation distinguishes between ships' normal operational discharges [regulated in MARPOL (see below) and implemented domestically through APPS (see next page)] and dumping of wastes from vessels (covered by the London Convention and implemented domestically by the Ocean Dumping Act). For more information, visit www.epa.gov/history/topics/mprsa/index.htm.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE PREVENTION OF POLLUTION FROM SHIPS (MARPOL)

Established in 1973 and modified in 1978, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78) created international guidelines to prevent ship pollution. MARPOL has six annexes covering oil discharge, hazardous liquid control, hazardous material transport, sewage discharge, plastic and garbage disposal and air pollution. Annex V controls the disposal of plastics and garbage into the oceans from ships. For more information, visit www.imo.org/conventions/mainframe.asp?topic_id=258&doc_id=678.



RYAN BINNS, MARINE PHOTOGRAPH



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ACT TO PREVENT POLLUTION FROM SHIPS (APPS)

Mandated in 1983, this act gives the U.S. Coast Guard the authority to develop regulations and enforce MARPOL Annex V, including the discharge of garbage and plastics from ships. The Act applies to all U.S. flag ships anywhere in the world and to all foreign flag vessels operating in navigable U.S. waters or while at a port or terminal under U.S. jurisdiction. The Act also establishes regulations for operational discharges and dumping of wastes from vessels. For more information, visit www.senate.gov/~epw/atppfs.pdf.

MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION RESEARCH AND CONTROL ACT (MPPRCA)

The U.S. Congress passed the Marine Plastic Pollution Research and Control Act (MPPRCA) in 1987 to implement Annex V. Under MPPRCA, it is illegal to throw plastic trash off any vessel within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (within 200 nautical miles of the shoreline). It is also illegal to throw any other garbage overboard while navigating in U.S. waters or within three miles of shore. For more information, visit <http://dnrweb.dnr.state.md.us/download/cleanmarina/10Lawson.pdf>.

SHORE PROTECTION ACT

The Shore Protection Act of 1994 provides controls on transport vessels to prevent the release of municipal or commercial solid wastes into coastal waters. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-GENERAL/1995/December/Day-13/pr-755.html.

BEACHES ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND COASTAL HEALTH ACT (B.E.A.C.H. ACT)

The B.E.A.C.H. Act of 2000 amends the Clean Water Act, requiring adoption of minimum health-based water quality criteria, comprehensive water testing and public notification when water contamination levels are unsafe. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/act.html.

CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT

The Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 authorizes NOAA to provide assistance to any U.S. state, territory or possession that contains a coral reef ecosystem within its seaward boundaries in removing abandoned fishing gear, marine debris and abandoned vessels from coral reefs. For more information, visit www.coreocean.org/coralreef.html or www.coralreef.noaa.gov/grants.html.

MARINE DEBRIS RESEARCH, PREVENTION AND REDUCTION ACT

Signed into law in 2006, the Marine Debris Research, Prevention and Reduction Act establishes a program within NOAA to identify, assess, reduce and prevent marine debris and its effects on the marine environment. The Act also directs NOAA to reestablish the Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee, work with the U.S. Coast Guard to establish a definition of "marine debris," develop a federal marine debris information clearinghouse, emphasize the importance of outreach and education and work with the international community to address marine debris on a global scale. For more information, visit www.ocean.us/node/524 or www.commerce.senate.gov/pdf/marinedebris_mark.pdf.