Trash Free Waters…

Reducing and Eliminating Aquatic Trash from Our Nation's Waterways

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Trash Free Waters Program

A strategic approach to reduce trash and debris in aquatic ecosystems

EPA Goal Statement: Develop a program with a focused set of actions that support trash prevention and reduction initiatives by many public and private stakeholders, resulting in significantly less trash entering watersheds and the marine environment, approaching zero loadings of trash into coastal watersheds and ecosystems within 10 years.

Aquatic Trash Impacts

- Trash is a pervasive problem for oceans and coasts, causing economic, aesthetic, and ecological impacts.
- No aggregate trash loading number exists (yet), but 2011 international coastal clean-up events collected over 9 million pounds of trash in a single day.
- **Approximately 80% of aquatic trash comes from land-based sources. Trash on land has numerous pathways to aquatic ecosystems.**
- Over 51 billion pieces of litter end up on US roads each year.
- Litter cleanup costs the U.S. almost $11.5 billion each year.
- **Plastic is estimated to make up 60-80% of marine debris. Highly durable plastic containers and packaging are used for many short-term purposes.**
- Plastic debris appears to be a vector for transfer of PBTs from the water to the food web, increasing risk to all animals in the marine food web, including humans.
- Public can easily relate to reduction of aquatic trash goal and support. Gives EPA visibility in a positive way for an issue that the public cares about.

Factors That Limit Progress

The issue is widely viewed as a problem but rarely as a priority, resulting in piecemeal actions with limited impact rather than sustainable solutions.

1) The aquatic trash problem grows more severe every day, but there still are no "bottom line" numbers on the volume, impacts, and societal costs of litter and debris.

2) The major issue of human health effects remains unresolved, though studies now indicate that humans may be exposed to toxics via the marine food web.

3) Success depends upon behavior change, but the current public and private sector resources and initiatives do not provide a clear and compelling message.

4) Despite general agreement that plastics and packaging are the top trash elements, there is no effective public/private effort to reduce loadings in "game-changing" ways.

5) State and municipal programs are fragmented and often ill-informed about options. The successful EPA Region 9 whole-system approach has not yet been replicated.

Stakeholders have expressed support for EPA playing a catalyst role to help regions, states, localities, businesses, and others develop effective strategies.

Trash Free Waters
Five Program Elements

(and initial actions)

1) **Make the case that the impacts of trash in aquatic ecosystems justify priority action.**

   Analyze societal costs of "reactive" trash management and benefits of "preventive" actions.

2) **Determine whether plastic trash has major human health effects in the food chain.**

   Convene an expert scientific panel to assess existing data and studies.

3) **Define the next generation of public engagement in trash prevention.**

   Create a one-stop Resource Directory; develop a public/private outreach campaign.

4) **Create a Sustainable Materials Management program for plastics packaging.**

   Develop product stewardship initiatives with key manufacturing & service sectors.

5) **Establish regional partnership programs for zero trash in coastal watersheds.**

   Develop integrated regional strategies to better support state and local programs.

Trash Free Waters
The Regional Goals for the Gulf of Mexico

1. Develop policies and programs to achieve reductions of aquatic trash within Gulf eco-regions as they relate to specific waste streams of concern.
2. Support local initiatives to collect trash data within specific watersheds and use that data as a basis for analyzing the efficacy of tailored technologies, policies and programs to reduce and prevent aquatic trash.
3. Forge public-private partnerships that support sustainable materials management and activities that promote source reduction and the prevention of aquatic trash from entering our waterways.
4. Collaborate with federal and Gulf state partners, as well as quasi-governmental entities (e.g., Ports), to innovate and extend effective aquatic trash management practices to broader geographic areas.
5. Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders in a manner appropriate for the Gulf region cultures so as to inspire the proliferation of successful practices and the development of new technologies for controlling aquatic trash.

Trash Free Waters
The Seven Kick-Off Projects

- **Project #1: Atlas of Gulf States Litter Control Policy and Programs**
- **Project #2: Scrap Tires in Texas**
- **Project #3: We Love Florida's Water: NestleWaters Tampa Project**
- **Project #4: State Agency Policy and Guidance on Employee Use of Plastic Bottles**
- **Project #5: Ordinances Across Louisiana**
- **Project #6: Port of New Orleans**
- **Project #7: *Mobile Bay Trash Boat Competition***

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