

SEA PARTNER PROGRAM

BEACH CLEANUPS

The annual International Coastal Cleanup and other local shoreline cleanups are excellent opportunities for Sea Partners teams to promote marine environmental protection. Volunteers who participate in beach cleanups become people who are even more committed to protecting the environment than they may have been before. A volunteer who spends several hours picking up trash off the beach is unlikely to litter in the future and probably more likely to encourage others not to litter.

The following information was extracted partly from “All About Beach Cleanups: A Helpful Planning Guide”, by Linda Maramiss of the Center for Marine Conservation.

In the face of overwhelming environmental problems such as global warming or catastrophic oil spills, over which we have little or no control, it is not uncommon to feel powerless to help, powerless to change things. But citizen beach cleanups demonstrate that we are not powerless in the fight to stop marine debris. Marine debris is caused by people and can only be stopped by people. A beach littered with trash a depressing sight. But a beach lined with volunteers armed with trash bags and eager to clean up is a positive, hope-filled sight.

The International Coastal Cleanup, held on the third Saturday of September in connection with Coastweeks, is unique in that volunteers not only bag trash, but also record each item of trash collected by category on a “data card” (see sample). The Center for Marine Conservation (CMC) then collects these cards, tabulates all the data and publishes an annual report of results. The reports are useful to communities trying to identify the locations, causes and trends of marine debris problems. In 1998, CMC also published a 10-year retrospective on the history of the cleanup. Statistics from this report can be found at the end of this chapter.

As the U.S. agency responsible for enforcing the provisions of federal laws resulting from the international MARPOL Annex V agreement, the Coast Guard has an interest in the data accumulated from the annual cleanup as a measurement tool. Also, Coast Guard volunteers who are seen coordinating or participating in local cleanups help to project the positive image of the Coast Guard as a pro-active “pollution fighter.”

Cleanup Coordinator

The Beach Cleanup Coordinator is the key to a well-organized beach cleanup. Coordinators may operate at various levels. For the International Coastal Cleanup, there is an overall U.S. coordinator at the Center for Marine Conservation’s Washington, D.C., office. Each state participating in the cleanup has a state coordinator. In some states these are volunteers or members of an environmental organization which supports the cleanup. In other states, the

state coordinator is a state employee. Some states have coordinator responsibilities divided into regions. CMC publishes a list of state coordinators each spring in the *Coastal Connection* newsletter. This information can also be found on the Center's web page at <http://www.cmc-ocean.org>.

The state coordinator assists local coordinators in:

- Selecting sites for cleanup
- Coordinating with other agencies
- Procuring sponsors
- Providing supplies (trash bags, data cards, pencils)
- Funneling volunteers to sites

For local or regional events, there may be an overall event coordinator or committee responsible for selecting a theme or slogan, providing publicity, printing posters, making media connections and arranging site support.

Since the cleanup coordinator is often responsible for soliciting donations of funds or goods-in-kind to support the cleanup, Coast Guard personnel should not serve in that position. Coast Guard volunteers can work with the planning committee in organizing the cleanup but should not be involved in direct solicitation of donations lest a conflict-of-interest situation be generated or perceived.

Site Captain

Each beach to be cleaned needs a site captain (or local coordinator) to handle the many details necessary for a successful cleanup. The site captain will work closely with the state, regional or event coordinator to make sure that the event goes well at the assigned site. Site captains should be selected several months ahead of the date of the cleanup, so that they have sufficient time to prepare.

Steps in advance planning on the part of the site captain include:

- Survey the area to be cleaned
- Select an appropriate spot for the registration table
- Determine where trash bag collection will take place
- Arrange for trash hauling; inquire with trash haulers about possibility of recycling some items
- Work with state, regional or event coordinator on publicity

- Recruit volunteers
- Gather supplies (see suggested list)
- Make directional markers or signs
- Watch tide charts and weather forecasts
- Plan for emergencies; arrange for First Aid assistance

On the day of the cleanup, site captains need to:

- Arrive early
- Set up registration table and supplies
- Have all volunteers sign in (the sign-in sheet may contain a liability waiver statement)
- Give general directions to groups as they register
- Take pictures or appoint a photographer
- Collect data cards
- Be sure all trash bags are hauled away from the site
- Thank the volunteers

After the cleanup, the site captain should:

- Contact media with the day's results
- Mail completed data cards to state coordinator
- Mail photos with identifying captions to state coordinator
- Submit articles and photos to internal or local publications
- Write thank-you's to any supportive parties

Keeping Volunteers Safe

The site captain must inform volunteers about potential hazards at the cleanup site. When talking to them by phone in advance of the event, encourage them to dress appropriately for conditions (e.g., long pants for brushy areas, boots or sneakers, hats, sunscreen, insect repellent, sunglasses, work gloves, water bottle). You may want to prepare an information sheet, along with a map, to give or mail to volunteers in advance (see sample).

Volunteers should be warned not to approach 55-gallon drums or any other unmarked containers, since they may contain toxic chemicals. Any information on drums should be noted from a distance and reported to the site captain. Site captains should then notify the Coast Guard or local environmental protection authorities about the presence of such drums.

Also remind volunteers to be on the lookout for broken glass and syringes. These items, if picked up, should be placed inside a container, such as a bottle or coffee can – not put loose in a trash bag where they could harm the trash haulers. Give volunteers the option of not touching these items at all. Any children in the volunteer group should be well-supervised by adults and not allowed to wander off into the cleanup area on their own.

Publicity

Media coverage is very important to the success of the cleanup. Articles and editorials about the problem of marine debris have appeared in many major U.S. newspapers. Radio stations may want to broadcast live from the cleanup.

Invite a public official or celebrity to attend the cleanup – the media will follow.

Entice reporters with a local angle – a Scout troop participating in the event, for instance.

Prepare information for the press in advance – marine debris statistics from previous cleanups, information on MARPOL regulations and the Coast Guard's role in enforcement, information on the Sea Partners program, information about what local agencies or businesses are doing to tackle the problem, etc. Be prepared to answer questions (see the chapter in this manual on Public Affairs).

Data Collection

Some volunteers worry that recording data takes valuable time away from collecting trash. Remember that the data collected at your beach cleanup will have a longer-lasting impact in the fight to stop marine debris than will just picking up trash for one day. You can emphasize to volunteers that their data will be used later by scientists and policymakers to develop permanent solutions to the problem of marine debris.

The Coast Guard uses the data from the International Coastal Cleanup to assess MARPOL enforcement efforts. In the annual report, CMC estimates what percentage of the data collected comes from maritime sources, such as ships and offshore platforms. This figure is compared from year to year to determine trends in the effectiveness of the MARPOL laws.

| Year | Pieces of debris from maritime sources | Percent of total debris | Miles of shoreline | Pieces of marine debris per mile of shoreline cleaned | Percent decline from previous year |
|------|--|-------------------------|--------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| 93 | 462,044 | 6.30% | 4,498 | 103 | -- |
| 94 | 397,314 | 6.55% | 5,148 | 77 | 24.87% |
| 95 | 302,708 | 7.46% | 5,870 | 52 | 33.18% |
| 96 | 286,291 | 7.63% | 5,930 | 48 | 6.38% |
| 97 | 386,555 | 6.58% | 7,093 | 54 | -15.30% |

Since the debris is collected, recorded and weighed by untrained volunteers, CMC and the Coast Guard recognize that it is not a scientific study of marine debris trends. However, it is the only data that has been consistently kept over a period of 10 years. CMC is currently undertaking a five-year National Marine Debris Monitoring Project, with a scientifically-based protocol for site selection, debris collection and quality monitoring. Results of this effort, however, will not be available until completion of the study.

Underwater Cleanups

Collecting marine debris from under the water's surface has become increasingly popular. Such efforts can be extremely beneficial to the marine environment, as underwater debris is hazardous to marine life.

But an untrained SCUBA diver can cause more harm than good by removing marine debris improperly. Some marine debris is not hazardous. Rather, it has become substrate or habitat and should not be removed. Removal of underwater debris can also be hazardous to divers themselves, resulting in cuts, abrasions, entanglement or exposure to toxins.

Before getting involved in an underwater cleanup, contact an organization such as CMC or the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) for information, advice and assistance.

Site Captain Sample Supplies List

- Direction signs
- Tape or tacks
- Folding table for registration
- Folding chairs
- Sign-in list
- Instruction sheet or poster
- Trash bags
- Clear or different-color bags for collecting recyclables
- Colored tags for recyclables bags
- Clipboards
- Data cards
- Pencils (sharpened)
- Work gloves, dishwashing gloves or latex gloves
- Pointed “pick-up” sticks
- Pocket knife
- Name tag
- Your business cards
- First Aid kit
- Insect repellent
- Poison ivy repellent
- Picture of poison ivy, snakes or other potential hazards
- Sunscreen
- Notepad
- Pamphlets, color books, other printed information
- Camera
- Water cooler with water
- Cups
- Bathroom scale (for weighing trash bags)
- Radio or cell phone
- Contact numbers for local organizers and authorities
- Cooler with sodas, bottled water
- Fruit, chips or other snacks
- Hand wipes