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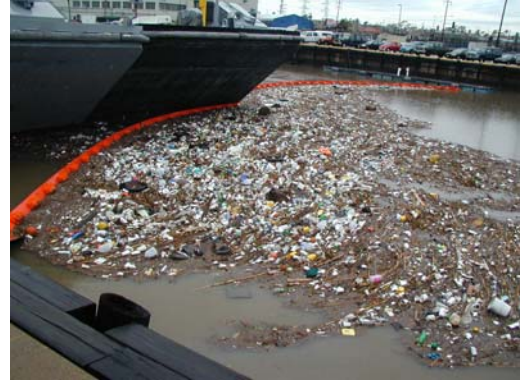
Santa Monica
Baykeeper

Ventura
Coastkeeper

Stop Plastic Pollution from Trashing California's Beaches

In Brief

Plastic pollution is accumulating in our oceans at an alarming rate. Marine debris is not just an unpleasant eyesore on California's oceans and beaches; it also poses a serious threat to the sea birds, turtles and sea lions that accidentally ingest it or feed it to their young. Researchers estimate that 80% of marine debris comes from land-based sources, particularly through urban runoff.



Trash at the mouth of Chollas Creek.
Meleah Ashford.

Legal Landscape

In 2008, California's Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopted an "Implementation Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Ocean Litter." Regional Water Boards are working to control coastal and marine debris through Clean Water Act Section 303(d), which calls for imposing "Total Maximum Daily Loads" on the amount of trash that cities can discharge through their storm drains into polluted waterways. These requirements will likely be implemented more broadly statewide through storm water permits and other measures, as proposed in the State Water Board's 2010 proposed "Trash Policy," which will likely be completed in 2011.

Moving Forward

In order to address California's persistent and growing problems with plastic pollution, we need to redefine our relationship with plastic packaging and other items that end up littering our streets and storm drains. A growing number of California municipalities are taking initiative to regulate and ban non-degradable packaging. San Jose, Los Angeles County, Santa Monica and unincorporated Marin County have all recently passed ordinances that establish prohibitions on the distribution of plastic bags, and the number continues to grow. These efforts will be enhanced by Regional and State Water Board issuance of clear and binding numeric limits on the amount of trash that cities can discharge through their storm drains. Finally, measures should also be taken to reduce sea-based sources of harmful debris, such as derelict fishing gear that ghost-traps marine life in perpetuity.

Learn More. Visit the Ocean Protection Council's plastic pollution page at www.opc.ca.gov/2010/01/preventing-ocean-litter-2/. Learn about the Clean Seas Coalition, a network of environmentalists, scientists, lawmakers, students, and community leaders working to strengthen laws reducing plastic pollution at www.cleanseascoalition.org. Track the Water Board's Trash Policy at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/plans_policies/#policies.

Key Issues: Stormwater, Marine Debris, Trash, Marine Wildlife