



Reconnect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, their affect on your community and actions for your involvement.



FRAN SKELLIE/Contributed photo

Penn State Behrend students remove bags of plastic and other garbage at the 4 Mile Creek location for the 2012 ICC.

Coastal Cleanup in Erie needs you to volunteer

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

The next time you use a throwaway plastic item — a bag, bottle, straw or utensil — ask yourself: “Is this really convenient, considering the impact plastic is having on our waterways, ocean and wildlife?”

Spread the message about what every person can do to make a difference. Bring your own reusable bag to the grocery store, refuse plastic one-use items and participate in the local International Coastal Cleanup. Every little effort keeps trash from entering our waterways and ocean, and protects marine wildlife.

The National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will join forces again with Ocean Conservancy for the annual event, and you can, too. Be sure to sign up to clean up the Erie region on Saturday, Sept. 21, from 9 a.m. until noon.

For more information about the 16 locations in Erie County and to register, visit www.goerie.com/coastalcleanup or contact Jake Moore of DEP’s Coastal Resources Management Program at 217-9634 or e-mail jacmoore@pa.gov.

ANNA McCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Neighborhood Art House “Environmental Detectives” paint a message on a storm drain.

Young sleuths search out sources of water pollution

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Eight young sleuths in the Neighborhood Art House summer class “Environmental Detectives” investigated stormwater management, storm drains and the impact of litter on our creeks, Presque Isle Bay, Lake Erie and the Atlantic Ocean.

They participated in the Ocean Conservancy’s Storm Drain Sentries Program and are involved in the Pennsylvania Sea Grant Great Lakes Great Stewards NOAA B-WET project to engage local students in watershed stewardship projects.

The most common pollutant they found in their investigation was cigarette butts, but they also found plenty of evidence of yard waste and sediment near

the storm drains. To alert the public to the hazards of allowing storm drains to carry pollution into our waterways, they placed door hangers on about 40 houses and businesses and talked to 10 people at home or on the street. Their project also included stenciling 12 storm drains in residential and commercial areas in the neighborhood with the message “Pollution mistake, drains to lake.”

These young detectives also presented their project during the gathering time at the Art House. One of them hopes to engage his school in a similar project this fall.

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WIKIMEDIA.ORG FOREST AND KIM STARR

The International Coastal Cleanup spotlights problems caused by consumer litter washed from the interiors of continents via sewers, storm drains, streams and rivers or from coasts into the ocean. Trash even ends up at remote locations including Midway Atoll. Animals and birds like the Laysan Albatross mistake plastic for plankton, fish eggs or other food and then die.

Out of bounds

Plastic debris despoils coasts and endangers marine life

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

This message from the sea is not in a bottle.

It is found on and in whales, turtles, birds, fish and other wildlife.

The message being shouted at us is that we must do something about the tidal wave of plastic waste that is killing and endangering marine life and damaging the water resources so necessary for our own survival.

Even the most remote or once pristine coasts are littered with plastic, Styrofoam and other garbage. While some was dumped recklessly from boats, the

majority comes from land and was swept down rivers or storm drains, blown off the land or carried to new locations by ocean currents.

Volunteers have been collecting and documenting the trash they find each year along Lake Erie and its tributaries during the International Coastal Cleanup. In 2012, they joined more than 550,000 volunteers worldwide to collect 10 million pounds of marine debris.

Their efforts not only keep this trash from entering the ocean, but their data clearly demonstrates this problem is enormous. We know that most of

the trash is plastic and that presents the biggest problem. Because plastic does not biodegrade, microbes that break down other substances leave it alone. Heavier items sink below the surface. Sunlight eventually photodegrades the plastic polymer bonds of the floating plastic but this just makes matters worse. In either case, the plastic never goes away.

As the plastic is reduced to smaller and smaller pieces until they are microscopic, plastic enters the food chain when eaten by marine organisms.

Threats to the marine environment, our economy and health will only wors-

en unless we change our consumption of disposable items. The best solution is prevention. You can join volunteers on Sept. 21 to keep items collected that day from becoming marine debris.

But you can also change your consumption of single-use plastic items by using reusable water bottles and other utensils and seeking out other products that move us all away from the “throwaway” society.

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

This Laysan Albatross was mistakenly fed plastic by its parents. Many unsuspecting animals, such as sea turtles, seabirds and marine mammals, often mistake plastic trash for food.



CASCADIA RESEARCH

Evidence of the urgent need to prevent plastic pollution was found in the stomach of a dead gray whale on Puget Sound — 20 plastic bags, surgical gloves, a pair of sweat pants, a golf ball and other plastic pieces.



NOAA FISHERIES

An endangered Hawaiian monk seal has a discarded plastic container lodged over its muzzle. Had the container not been removed, this seal may have starved to death.



ABC.NET.AU

Coastal cleanups will not solve debris ingestion and entanglement for sea turtles that confuse plastic bags and balloons for jellyfish. The answer is addressing our use of throwaway plastic.

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Plastic water and soda bottles, straws, food wrappers, cups, plates, forks, spoons, and knives. You may think picnic but — it's no picnic when they become marine debris. These items are on the “Top 10 ICC Items Found” during last year’s event, with cigarette butts leading the pack. Expect no shortage of them this year. Write a letter to the editor to encourage readers to use reusable bags, bottles and utensils instead and to participate in this year’s ICC.

