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Waterkeeper

Klamath
Riverkeeper

Monterey
Coastkeeper

Orange County
Coastkeeper

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San Diego
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San Luis Obispo
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Santa Barbara
Channelkeeper

Santa Monica
Baykeeper

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Stop Marine Debris from Trashing California's Beaches

In Brief

Marine debris 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. Marine debris also transports invasive species that devastate nearshore ecosystems. Researchers estimate that 80% of marine debris comes from land-based sources, particularly through urban runoff.

Legal Landscape

In 2008, California's Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopted an "Implementation Strategy to Reduce and Prevent Ocean Litter." The Strategy offers sixteen recommendations, ranging from banning smoking on state beaches to education and clean-up initiatives. Regional Water Boards are also 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.

Moving Forward

In order to address California's persistent and growing problems with marine debris, we need to redefine our relationship with plastic packaging and other items that end up littering our streets and storm drains. State agencies should be given needed authority and funding to take action on the Ocean Protection Council's 2008 Implementation Strategy. It is also important that the Regional Water Boards establish clear and binding numeric limits on the amount of trash that cities can discharge through their storm drains. Measures should also be taken to reduce sea-based sources of marine debris, such as derelict fishing gear. An effort is currently underway to establish a reporting hotline for anglers who have lost their gear at sea.

In Your Community

Learn about the work your local Waterkeeper does to keep trash and other pollutants out of your Community's waterways at <http://www.cacoastkeeper.org/waterkeepers/california-waterkeepers>.

Learn More. Visit the Ocean Protection Council's detailed web page on preventing ocean litter at www.opc.ca.gov/2010/01/preventing-ocean-litter-2/.



Trash fills a Los Angeles storm drain. Source: SWRCB.