

Marine Debris: We are all the solution!

Marine debris is considered any improperly discarded or otherwise lost man-made item that enters the coastal and marine ecosystem. Not only is marine debris **unsightly**, it can **clog waterways**, become a **navigational hazard**, and pollute swimming and recreational areas. Worst of all - it can entangle and **injure birds, fish, turtles, dolphins and other marine life**. Many marine debris items may appear as food to marine life and **ingested pieces of litter can cause malnutrition, starvation, and death**.

Marine debris can come from activities near or on the water - **Ocean-based marine debris**, or from activities far away from the shore - **Land-based marine debris**. The most common marine debris items found in Louisiana are **cigarette filters, food wrappers, plastic lids, bottles and grocery bags, paper bags, metal and glass beverage containers, and plastic straws and utensils**. Under the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) it is **illegal to discard plastic in the ocean**.

Marine debris items are often a problem because **they persist in the environment for long periods of time**. A plastic grocery bag can persist **over 20 years** while a glass bottle may persist for **over 1 million years**. Not all marine debris is easily seen. While plastic items such as bags and lids may float, other items such as **metal cans, batteries, and fishing gear** will **sink to the ocean floor** and cause harm not only to animals but their **seafloor habitats**.

Prevention and removal of marine debris is the **responsibility of all citizens**. Simple steps can be taken to eliminate problems associated with marine debris.

Tips to Prevent Marine Debris:

1. Always properly discard trash.
2. Reduce, reuse, or recycle when possible.
3. Use ashtrays for cigarette filters.
4. Never place trash in the bed of a truck.
5. Use reusable grocery bags.
6. Cut beverage rings into small pieces before properly discarding.
7. Properly discard used fishing line and other tackle.
8. While boating off-shore, secure all refuse onboard until it can be properly discarded.
9. Participate in or organize community debris removal programs.
10. Lead by example: Encourage others to follow marine debris prevention

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