

Aquatic trash harvest nets 11.4 million objects

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(03-11) 04:00 PDT West Palm Beach, Fla. --

Nearly 7 million pounds of debris were collected from waterways and shorelines around the world during a single day last year, illustrating that careless people are discarding trash just about everywhere, with much of it eventually finding an aquatic home, according to a report released Tuesday.

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Nearly 400,000 volunteers scoured about 17,000 miles of coastline, river bottoms and ocean floors during the Ocean Conservancy's 23rd International Coastal Cleanup in September.

The group's report said more than 3.2 million cigarette butts were picked up during last year's efforts, making

them the most common items found. Volunteers also collected 26,585 tires, enough for 6,646 cars - and a spare.

Of the 104 participating countries, the United States supplied about half the volunteers.

Volunteers collected about 11.4 million items overall, which weighed a total of 6.8 million pounds. They snagged more than 1.3 million cigarette butts in the United States alone, about 19,500 fishing nets in the United Kingdom and more than 11,000 diapers in the Philippines.

"Our ocean is sick, and our actions have made it so," said Vikki Spruill, the Ocean Conservancy's president and CEO. "The evidence turns up every day in dead and injured marine life, littered beaches that discourage tourists, and choked ocean ecosystems."

The group said thousands of marine mammals, sea turtles and birds are injured or killed by ocean trash every year. During the event, participants found 268 marine animals that survived being entangled in debris. But 175 weren't so lucky and died: a seal wrapped in fishing line near Santa Cruz; a juvenile hammerhead shark entangled in fishing line near

St. Augustine, Fla.; a sea turtle tangled in rope in the west African nation of Ghana; and a penguin entangled in wire in Rio de Janeiro.

The majority of trash, the report said, comes from land-based activities, such as discarding of fast food wrappers during beach picnics.

"Your trash may make it to the beach before you do this year," the report said, adding that a wrapper or cigarette butt discarded on an inland city street can quickly wash down storm drains into rivers and eventually flow out to the ocean.

The next cleanup is set for Sept. 19.

Top trash items

The 10 most common debris items found worldwide during the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup in September.

Cigarettes and filters: 3,216,991

Plastic bags: 1,377,141

Food wrappers and containers: 942,620

Caps and lids: 937,804

Plastic bottles: 714,892

Paper bags: 530,607

Straws and stirrers: 509,593

Cups, plates and cutlery: 441,053

Glass bottles: 434,990

Drink cans: 401,412

Source: Ocean Conservancy

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