

For Eye on the Environment, October 20, 2013

Coastal Cleanup Day Results

By *Kelly Hahs*, Ventura County Watershed Protection District

Volunteers picked up over five tons of litter from Ventura County beaches, parks, and waterways in just three hours. Think about that - cigarette butts, paper cups, and plastic water bottles hardly weigh anything at all, but were a significant part of the over 10,000 pounds of trash collected during Ventura County's Coastal Cleanup Day on September 21, 2013. Almost 3,000 people in Ventura County chose to spend their Saturday morning picking up litter to get it out of the environment and prevent it from becoming marine debris. Statewide, with only 70% of sites reporting their totals so far, there were more than 51,000 volunteers. In Ventura County alone, volunteers covered more than 40 miles and collected more than 9,000 pounds of trash and 1,300 pounds of recyclables from the 20 local cleanup sites.

However, Coastal Cleanup Day was only a month ago and sadly there is already a new wave of trash being deposited around our County. Just last week I watched someone drop their cigarette butt on the ground, grind it very carefully with their foot to be sure it was out, and then walk away, leaving it behind to be blown into the gutter and carried to the ocean by stormwater or urban runoff. Although cigarette filters often look like cotton, they are actually made of cellulose acetate (a type of plastic), which means that they don't biodegrade. Additionally, the filters are designed to trap particulates from cigarette smoke, including toxic chemicals, so the toxic components of the cigarette are concentrated in discarded filters, which make them especially hazardous for animals in aquatic communities that mistake the filters for food or become exposed to the toxins through the water. Cigarette waste is consistently the most abundant trash type collected at Coastal Cleanup Day, and while the number of cigarette butts collected this year is still being totaled, more than 18,940 were collected at last year's Cleanup in Ventura County.

Single use food and beverage containers, including food wrappers and bags, cups and lids, drinking straws, plastic bottles, and bottle caps were again a major component of the five tons of trash that was collected. Some easy options to help cut back on this type of litter include taking your reusable mug out for coffee, bringing your own cup to use at fountain drink dispensers in take-out restaurants and convenience stores, and buying snacks in bulk and transferring them to reusable containers (and then take the containers home and reuse them again). If you don't have your reusable mug or cup with you and you really need that coffee or soda, skip the straw or lid if you don't need it. And if you do find yourself holding an empty single use item, make sure it goes into a trash can (or recycle bin if appropriate) when you are done with it.

If smoking and food related litter were eliminated, there would be very little trash left for us to pick up. Preventing trash pollution is straightforward. Use reusable items. Place your trash in designated trash cans. Talk to your friends and family about the impacts of trash pollution, and encourage them to dispose of their trash properly, too. Be part of next year's Coastal Cleanup Day, held on the third Saturday in September. Volunteers, site captains, and sponsors are needed. The contributions of this year's volunteers, site captains, and sponsors, including the Community for a Clean Watershed, NRG Energy, Gold Coast Broadcasting LLC, and Ventura County Star, are the reason that five tons of litter was able to be collected from our beaches, parks, and waterways and disposed of properly. Of course, you do not have to wait for Coastal Cleanup Day to be an environmental steward. Keep your "eye on the environment" by taking a bag with you on your next walk or hike, and pick up any trash you may encounter on the way.

On the net:

www.vccoastcleanup.org

www.cleanwatershed.org.

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agencies who want to submit articles on environmental topics for this column should contact David Goldstein at david.goldstein@ventura.org