

2001 International Coastal Cleanup Top Ten List

Debris Items	Land	Underwater	Total
cigarettes / cigarettes filters	1,521,345	6,492	1,527,837
bags / food wrappers	922,984	10,872	933,856
caps, lids	537,885	3,547	541,432
beverage bottles (plastic) & 2 liters	443,656	5,103	448,759
cups, plates, forks, knives, spoons	435,620	3,781	439,401
beverage cans	345,337	9,720	355,057
beverage bottles (glass)	275,493	9,637	285,130
straws, stirrers	225,712	1,191	226,903
fast-food containers	220,317	2,328	222,645
fishing nets	181,479	674	182,153
TOTALS	5,109,828	53,345	5,163,173

The most frequently found items have been reported since the beginning of the ICC. The "Top Ten" list represents the 10 most abundant items and groupings found by volunteers. This list provides a quick reference to the most common forms of debris and identifies items and activities that can be targeted for effective public education and outreach campaigns.

What We Found...

Worldwide, the 2001 "Top Ten" list comprises 75.39% of all the debris collected. The three most abundant items collected were cigarettes/cigarette filters, (1,527,837 pieces at 22.31 %), bags/food wrappers (933,856 pieces at 13.64 %), and caps and lids (541,432 pieces at 7.91 %). Cigarette filters have been the top debris item for the past 12 years and this year, volunteers found enough cigarettes to equal 76,391 packs of cigarettes.

What It Means...

What appears on the Top Ten list provides an indicator of the behaviors and activities that are contributing to the marine debris problem. Since 1990, cigarette filters, beverage bottles, cans, caps and lids, and straws have remained in this upper echelon of debris items. Most of these items are whole or remnants of waste from prepackaged food or beverage products: what we throw away after we have consumed or used the product.

The message seems clear: the only way to control marine debris is to handle trash properly. The impact of such a simple behavior would be profound. If people could prevent just these 10 items from becoming marine debris, our beaches and oceans would become 82% cleaner! Education and behavioral changes are the key to reducing debris pollution. Promoting the installation of adequate waste disposal facilities, or more efficient waste removal may encourage people to alter their attitude towards littering.

The amount of trash collected during the cleanup gives us an idea of the hazards marine wildlife face daily. The picture could have been much worse. During the 2001 ICC, more than 1.53 million cigarette filters, 933,856 bags and food wrappers, 112,700 pieces of rope, 51,340 pieces of fishing line, 182,153 pieces of fishing nets, 55,121 balloons, 62,594 pieces of plastic sheeting or tarps, and 31,481 six-pack rings were collected. Many of these could have been ingested by or entangled unsuspecting animals. Remember, each piece of debris that enters the ocean or waterway has the potential to harm wildlife.