

Did You Know?

- On Henderson Island, 300 miles from the nearest inhabited island, and 3,000 miles from the nearest continent, 950 pieces of trash were discovered on the beach including glass bottles from 15 countries, buoys, crates, plastic pipe, and a football.
- It is estimated that five million items of marine litter are thrown overboard or lost from ships every day.
- Over 46,000 pieces of plastic litter are believed to be floating on every square mile of ocean.

Vessels 26 feet and longer must have at least one Annex V placard prominently posted, to notify all passengers and crew of discharge restrictions and penalties.

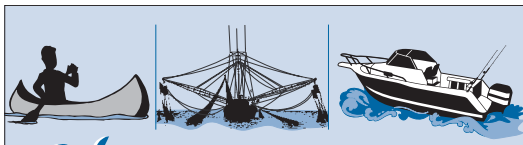
Vessels 40 feet and longer must have a written waste management plan on board.

U.S. law prohibits the discharging of “all plastics including, but not limited to, synthetic ropes, synthetic fishing nets, and plastic garbage bags.” The law also prohibits discharging food wastes and other floating materials into the Gulf of Mexico within 12 miles of land.

The above regulations are part of an international marine pollution prevention plan that the United States has adopted into law. It is named MARPOL. To find out more about MARPOL and to learn about MARPOL resources available to assist you in meeting those regulations, go to www.masgp.org/marpol.

This brochure was produced as a regional extension project for the Sea Grant Programs located in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi-Alabama, Florida and Puerto Rico.

MASGP-04-042



Sea Grant
Mississippi-Alabama

Help keep our local waters clean for everyone to enjoy.

PROTECTING YOUR FISHING WATERS

Ways to Reduce Derelict Fishing Gear and Other Marine Debris

- **COMMERCIAL**
- **CHARTER**
- **RECREATIONAL**

Derelict Fishing Gear Poses Serious Threat to Area Waters

Marine debris has been around as long as humans have been using the water. Approximately 14 billion pounds of trash end up in our oceans each year. Even though millions of dollars are spent annually cleaning the world's beaches and coastlines, the majority of the debris ends up floating on top of the ocean or resting on its floor. According to marine debris studies, between 30% and 40% of all this debris originates from ships at sea—merchant ships, cruise liners, government and service vessels, recreational/commercial boaters and fishermen, and oil and gas platforms.

How do fishermen contribute to marine debris? One state collected more than 100 tons of abandoned or lost fishing gear off its shores in one year. A marine debris study of 16 miles of Padre Island National Seashore off Texas indicated that 30% of all the trash found along the shoreline was generated by the shrimping industry. “Ghost fishing”—the unintentional trapping of marine animals in lost or discarded nets and traps—is considered a leading cause of marine animal deaths each year.

The environment and animals are not the only ones suffering from this water waste. Fishermen and other boaters are impacted, too. Lost or discarded fishing gear (nets, lines, etc.) can wrap

around propellers, anchors, or drive shafts. Plastic sheeting and plastic bags can clog cooling water intakes. These types of problems cost boat operators thousands of dollars each year in repair costs and down time. In addition to the monetary loss, a disabling incident at sea can endanger the lives of all on board—especially if power is lost in a storm and the boat cannot return to port, or steering is hampered and the boat cannot avoid a collision. Marine litter is also blamed for damaging nets and other equipment on trawlers as they work an area—oil containers, paint cans, and oil filters can contaminate the catch and equipment; larger pieces of debris can snag or tear holes in the nets.



Props from all size vessels become vulnerable to fouling from lost or abandoned fishing line and nets.

OTHER IMPACTS

- **Derelict fishing gear** damages reefs and entangles seabirds, sea turtles, and sea mammals. Lost or discarded nets have been proven to drift thousands of miles catching and killing fish, turtles, seabirds and other marine animals in their path.
- **Discarded plastics**, which make up 80% of the floating debris found in the ocean, are responsible for killing more than 100,000 marine mammals and over 1,000,000 seabirds each year due to ingestion or entanglement with items like fishing line and plastic bags. Recent studies indicate that floating plastics transport non-indigenous species, and even may be connected to algae blooms which have led to massive fish kills.
- **Marine debris** can be toxic, too. Ordinary garbage can release a worrisome class of chemicals known as persistent organic pollutants (POPs). POPs are extremely toxic even at low concentrations and build up in the fatty tissues of marine animals. POPs disrupt hormones that could result in cancer and birth defects.

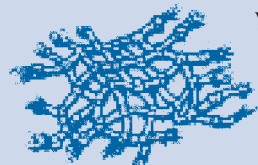


Commercial Fishers

Away at sea for long periods, commercial fishers must deal with trash buildup as part of their job. By law, commercial vessels are required to hold their garbage until they return to port. However, the temptation is always there to "lighten the load" instead of taking the time to store the trash. Action of this type harms the waters you fish, the sea life that inhabit the area, and even the gear and equipment of other vessels running through debris thrown overboard.

Even commercial fishers, such as crabbers, who just go out for the day need to take precautions. Thousands of crab traps are abandoned or lost each year in the Gulf of Mexico.

To help prevent this, crabbers need to pull out all damaged/unusable traps, recheck all floats and lines on each trip out, and verify that each trap hasn't drifted into a navigational channel where it might end up damaging boats or causing personal injury.



Also, containers for oil or detergents should be kept on hand. Most of the time liquid waste is dumped on purpose, due to inadequate storage or negligence, or lack of disposal facilities in ports. If your marina or port doesn't have proper recycling facilities, contact 1-800-CLEANUP to locate the closest place to recycle your liquid wastes.

Here are additional items commercial fishers can help keep out of our waters:

- Fishing nets (entire fishing nets or pieces of nets)
- String, cord, and plastic rope and line
- Foam and plastic buoys
- Salt bags
- Rubber gloves
- Light sticks
- Dirty rags
- Plastic floats and lures
- Plastic motor oil and lubricant bottles
- Boxes (fish boxes, cardboard boxes)
- Light bulbs

Charter Boat Captains

As more and more people are drawn to the popular sport of offshore fishing, charter boat captains and their deckhands will shoulder a larger responsibility to protect local waters from clients who don't have the same regard for the ocean.

Adopting a few practices such as maintaining designated disposal sites on board and securing potential flotsam can go a long way in preserving the quality of water. Instructing crew and clients on disposal policies is important, but backing up these policies with enforcement is just as important. Your supervision will make them more responsible fishers the next time they charter or go out on the water themselves.

Other practices to make a positive impact include:

- Have crew and clients properly dispose of beverage cans, food wrappers and bags, and discarded fishing tackle including fishing line.
- Stress that nothing other than ice is ever thrown into the water.
- Retrieve trash that accidentally falls overboard.
- Use fish cleaning stations and properly dispose of fish offal (wastes).
- Keep boat engines properly tuned for efficient fuel/oil consumption.
- Leave unnecessary packages and wrappings on shore.
- Use biodegradable products when possible.



Recreational Fishers

As the popularity of recreational fishing grows, it can affect critical habitat of fish and shellfish. Most fishers know that pollutants and increased vessel activity can cause harmful impacts on the habitat of fish. Proper disposal of items such as fishing line, lead weights, ice bags, plastic jig tails, six-pack rings, cardboard boxes, bait containers, and plastic products can minimize this impact.

Fishermen can also serve as stewards by encouraging dock or marina personnel to provide adequate garbage cans and recycling bins. All ports and marinas are required by law to provide trash containers for



boaters. With a little forethought, individual fishermen and recreational boaters can make a difference.

Other helpful practices include:

- Keep the engine maintained properly to prevent fuel or oil leaks.
- Secure items that may be blown overboard.
- Use permanent cups instead of foam or plastic cups; or be sure to use permanent cup holders on your vessel.
- Substitute paper, cloth, and other recyclable materials for plastic bags.
- Use bilge socks to remove oil before pumping bilge water overboard.
- Retrieve trash encountered in the water.
- Remove tangled or snagged monofilament fishing line from water.
- Stow away fishing weights, boxes, bags, and plastic sacks so they do not accidentally end up overboard.

Debris Decomposition Timeline

Cotton rope 1 yr.
Untreated plywood 1-3 yrs.
Plastic bag 10-20 yrs.
Commercial netting 30-40 yrs.
Foamed plastic buoy 80 yrs.
Aluminum can 80-200 yrs.
Plastic bottle 450 yrs.
Monofilament fishing line 600 yrs.
Glass bottle 1 million yrs.



The U.S. Coast Guard assists with the removal of this abandoned fishing net found in the open ocean.