Floatable Debris Encyclopedia Article

Floatable Debris

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Floatable Debris

Floatable debris is buoyant **solid waste** that pollutes waterways. Sources include boats and shipping vessels, storm water **discharge**, sewer systems, industrial activities, offshore drilling, recreational beaches, and landfills. Even waste dumped far from a water source can end up as floatable debris when **flooding**, high winds, or other weather conditions transport it into rivers and streams.

According to the U.S. **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA), floatable debris is responsible for the death of over 100,000 marine mammals and one million seabirds annually. **Seals**, **sea lions**, **manatees**, **sea turtles**, and other marine creatures often mistake debris for food, eating objects that block their intestinal tract or cause internal injury. They can also become entangled in lost fishing nets and line, six-pack rings, or other objects.

Fishing nets lost at sea catch tons of fish that simply decompose, a phenomenon known as "ghost fishing." Often, seabirds are ensnared in these nets when they try to eat the fish.

Lost nets and other entrapping debris are also a danger for humans who swim, snorkel, or scuba dive. And biomedical waste and sewage can spread disease in recreational waters. Floatable debris takes a significant financial toll as well. It damages boats, deters tourism, and negatively impacts the fishing industry.

Resources

Books

Coe, James, and Donald Rogers, eds. *Marine Debris: Sources, Impacts, and Solutions* New York: Springer-Verlag, 1996.

Periodicals

Miller, John. "Solving the Mysteries of Ocean-borne Trash." *U.S. News & World Report* 126, no.14 (April 1999): 48.

Other

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Oceans and Coastal Protection Division. *Assessing and Monitoring Floatable Debris—Draft.* [cited May 11, 2002]. <http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/ debris/floatingdebris>.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Water, Oceans and Coastal Protection Division. *Turning the Tide on Trash: A Marine Debris Curriculum* [cited May 2002]. <http://www.epa.gov/owow/OCPD/Ma rine/contents.htm> .

Organizations

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