

MARINE LITTER

A Louisiana Eyesore



LITTER. It's ugly and dangerous, and in coastal Louisiana it's everywhere, spilling into bayous and lakes, lining roadways, and scattered over beaches. Bottles and cans, bags and boxes, old tires and tennis shoes—an accumulation of trash that offends the eye,

creates economic disaster for mariners, kills or cripples marine animals, endangers human health, and inspires such barbs as "Louisiana, the litter state."

- In the Atchafalaya basin, a dead egret is found dangling from a tree, strangled by a discarded fishing line.
- A Gulf fisherman spends hundreds of dollars to repair damage to his vessel's engine which overheated when a floating plastic bag clogged the water intake.
- At Fourchon beach, a six-year-old child cuts his foot on a broken bottle and requires ten stitches and a tetanus shot.
- When asked their opinion of coastal Louisiana, a touring French Canadian couple say that it is a beautiful state—after dark. "But in the daylight—oh, so much trash!"

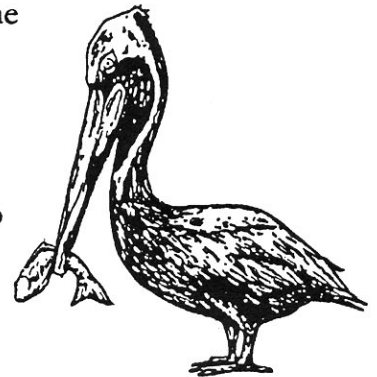
DID YOU KNOW?

Hundreds of marine animals, including porpoises, whales, dolphins, seals, sea turtles, and birds, die every year from eating plastic garbage that they mistake for food. Thousands die each year because they become entangled in discarded plastic fishing nets, fishing line, and six-pack yokes. An estimated 14 billion pounds of litter, much of it plastic, is dumped at sea every year by commercial shipping and fishing vessels, offshore petroleum platforms, naval operations, and recreational boaters. Not only is litter a hazard to marine animal life and people, but it limits the attraction of coastal areas for tourism—a real economic loss to coastal states.

Plastic and metal debris in the ocean is far slower to decompose than other kinds of litter. It has been estimated, for example, that a six-pack yoke can last in the marine environment over 400 years and that a discarded aluminum can or tab takes from 100 to 500 years to disintegrate.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT LITTER?

- Take as few plastic and metal products as possible onboard vessels and to the beach. Use bulk containers for drinks to reduce the number of cans and bottles you carry. Do not throw any trash overboard and be careful that nothing plastic falls into the water.
- If there are no trash receptacles on the beach where you are picnicking, take your utensils and other debris home for disposal. If possible take aluminum drink cans to a recycling station.
- When fishing, do not discard any pieces of torn net, broken fishing line, or plastic bait bags in the water. Dispose of worn out fishing gear onshore.
- Never throw anything out of a car. Besides being unsightly, litter on inland roads can make its way to the ocean and beaches via winds, streams, and rivers.
- Discourage any civic and social groups of which you may be a member from using mass helium balloon releases to celebrate events. Millions of latex balloons have found their way to the oceans and into the stomachs of marine animals.
- Encourage and support all community efforts to eliminate litter. Participate in beach cleanups, volunteer to work in public education campaigns, and support the installation and use of trash cans on beaches and at marinas.



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