



THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON OUR SHORELINES

Throughout the pandemic one thought has continually occurred to me, "I am so lucky to be on this island." I have taken full advantage of the shoreline and natural spaces we have access to as Whidbey Islanders and it has kept me sane through this trying time. It is clear I was not alone in feeling this way because the evidence of many, many people enjoying these beautiful places is there: trash. The evidence we humans leave behind. The good news is we can take action and maybe learn a thing or two in the process.

One type of human evidence is particularly persistent in the environment. It is found in many things, from straws and candy wrappers to the clothes we wear. Can you guess what it is?

That's right! Plastics. Scientists are learning more and more everyday about what these plastics do in the environment and how plastics affect living things. The plastics I notice when walking on the beach are large pieces of everyday plastic, but a lot of plastics that end up in the ocean are teeny, tiny pieces called micro-plastics. The smaller and smaller the plastic pieces become, the more living organisms can eat them. Those big pieces of everyday plastic we see on our beautiful beaches will be tossed around in the waves and broken into smaller and smaller pieces until they, too, are micro-plastics. Unless we take action and do something about it!

First, you can work at reducing the plastic you and your family use every day. Using a reusable water bottle, wearing clothes made of natural fibers, and replacing single use plastic items with reusable ones are all great places to start. Next, you and your family can head out to those beautiful beaches and pretty parks on our incredible island and conduct some rad research! We here at the Island County Marine Resources

Committee count on community science to monitor our local beaches. Here is a trash clean-up project you can do with your family to help us learn about the trash that's ending up on our shores:

Step 1: Visit the Island County Marine Resources Committee website at www.islandcountymrc.org to download the Trash Clean-Up Graph PDF to fill out.

Step 2: Collect the trash you find on the beach. Remember to keep yourself safe by following current COVID-19 protocols and do not pick up anything that looks dangerous, like sharp items or needles. If you find a large piece of debris or creosote-treated wood, you can report it to officials using the MyCoast app. Find more info and download the app at mycoast.org/wa.

Step 3: Sort your trash into plastics (including fishing line, Styrofoam, and nylon rope), metal (such as aluminum cans), paper (cardboard, beverage cups), and other. Count how many pieces you have in each category and record your data on the Trash Clean-Up Graph. If you can, take a picture of the trash you've collected.

Step 4: Properly throw away or recycle the trash and admire the clean beach you are leaving behind!

Step 5: Share your graphed results and trash pictures with us on Facebook (be sure to tag @ICEHDNR) or through email (a.prusha@islandcountywa.gov) and help us collect information about trash on our beaches so we can all keep working to make a difference!

If you would like to learn more about the Island County Marine Resources Committee and what we do, go to www.islandcountymrc.org or attend one of our monthly meetings! If we all take action and do our part to take care of our beautiful islands, we can make a difference for the community, wildlife, and ourselves.



Plastics on the beach (Photo Courtesy of Northwest Straits Commission)

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