

DNR Crew Removing Marine Debris From Willapa Bay Beaches

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - A Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) work crew began cleaning up accumulated marine debris that washed ashore on Willapa Bay beaches this summer. The 4-member crew last week focused its removal efforts on a stretch of beach west of Tokeland, an area between Bruceport County Park and the DNR-managed Bone River Natural Area Preserve on the east side of the bay. So far, the crew has removed 62 large garbage bags full of debris including pieces of Styrofoam and plastic bottles with Asian writing on them. It is unknown, however, if any of the debris is tied to the March 11, 2011, Japan tsunami that claimed near 20,000 lives and destroyed countless homes and structures. Items from many parts of the Pacific Rim, including buoys and consumer plastics, regularly wash up on Washington beaches. It is difficult to tell the origin of the debris without unique information such as an individual or company name, serial number or other identifying information. The seasonally-employed DNR crew usually works to eradicate non-native spartina cordgrass that has invaded Willapa Bay's intertidal waters and salt marshes. The crew finished its invasive species control work last week, but their season was extended to address marine debris in the area.

Crew supervisor and DNR biologist Todd Brownlee said: "It's very rewarding to be able to focus on debris removal. It is extremely fulfilling to have a direct impact on improving our environment." Brownlee said the crew is focusing on beaches that have the highest amounts of debris. Future cleanup efforts will take the crew east of Tokeland around to Willapa Bay. Next spring, the crew will be assigned to more marine debris cleanup before returning to its spartina eradication duties. Meanwhile, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) stands ready to redeploy state-funded trash bins on coastal beaches from Moclips south that have been temporarily removed to conserve funds. Ecology removed the trash bins after consulting with the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission and citizen beach cleanup volunteers, who report that no new marine debris has been observed washing ashore on coastal shorelines between Moclips and Cape Disappointment. Trash bins at Ocean Park in Pacific County were removed this week after volunteers completed a recent, targeted cleanup effort that was delayed to avoid disturbing important nesting habitat for the snowy plover, a small, threatened shorebird residing on Pacific Coast beaches. Washington saw a spike in amounts of marine debris on its coastal beaches in June 2012, but the quantity washing ashore decreased significantly over the summer. However, fall and winter weather and ocean current patterns typically wash more marine debris ashore than summertime conditions. Under state and federal statutes, no local, tribal, state or federal agency has the authority, responsibility or funding to pick up marine debris along beaches. Anyone encountering oil or hazardous materials like fuel tanks, gas cylinders, chemical totes and other containers with unknown fluids on Washington beaches should immediately report it by calling 1-855-WACOST (1-855-922-6278) and pressing "1." The Washington State Marine Debris Task Force - a group of state agencies led by the state Military Department's Emergency Management Division - has established a marine debris information email listserv for Washington residents and coastal visitors. People can join by going to Ecology's listserv page at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/maillist.html> and choosing "marine/tsunami debris." **More**

about marine debris, including potential tsunami debris. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) remains the best source for information about Japan tsunami marine debris including modeling, protocols to follow for handling marine debris and frequently asked questions. Go to <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/tsunamidebris/>. NOAA is actively collecting information about tsunami debris and asks the public to report debris sightings to DisasterDebris@noaa.gov. Please include the time, date, location and, if possible, photos in such reports. Don't burn driftwood. Salt residue from ocean waters stays in pores of the wood, even after it's dry. According to Ecology, when burned the chlorine reacts with the wood to form toxic compounds called dioxins that are released in the smoke. Such compounds can affect the immune system. If a beach fire is permitted, bring seasoned, non-driftwood, and enjoy. State Parks asks people who want to clean debris from beaches to focus on small, non-natural items such as Styrofoam and plastic. Leave wood and kelp because these are an important part of the beach ecosystem. Stripping the beach of its driftwood depletes needed coastal habitat. According to state law, it is illegal to burn garbage, and construction and demolition debris. More at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=70.94.6512>. **For more information: Washington Marine Debris web portal:** <http://marinedebris.wa.gov> **NOAA:** <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/tsunamidebris/> **Joint States tsunami debris information website:** <http://disasterdebris.wordpress.com/> **Washington Emergency Management Division:** <http://www.emd.wa.gov/index.shtml> **Washington Department of Health:** <http://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Emergency/TsunamiDebrisFAQ.aspx> **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife:** <http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/tsunami/> **Washington Department of Ecology:** <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/spills/spills.html> **Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:** <http://www.parks.wa.gov/> **Washington State Conservation and Recreation Office:** <http://www.rco.wa.gov/>