

Turn the tide on trash - annual coastal cleanup Saturday

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"Let's Make Trash Extinct," that's the slogan for the 29th annual California Coastal Cleanup Day, this Saturday, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

First organized in 1985, following the lead of Judie Neilson who organized the original Coastal Cleanup Day in Oregon in 1984, the annual California Coastal Cleanup Day (CCCD) is the state's largest volunteer event. From data figures provided by CCCD, the first cleanup in California brought 2,500 volunteers across the state. By 1993, those California volunteers jumped to a count of 50,405, and the amount of trash retrieved weighed in at 500,000 pounds. Jumping up to 2009, more than 80,622 California coastal volunteers picked up 1,173,416 pounds of trash and 214,125 pounds of recyclables.

The California Coastal Commission notes that since its beginnings, the reach of Coastal Cleanup Day has spread inland. "Most of the marine debris that we find on our beaches actually starts as urban trash or street litter, so this continuing effort to 'stop trash where it starts' has actually increased the amount of trash picked up per person each year."

The Pacifica Beach Coalition has been involved with CCCD since the Coalition was founded in 1997. Lynn Adams, who became president of the Beach Coalition in 2007, has facts on Pacifica's participation in Coastal Cleanup Day going back to 2005. In 2005, 246 Pacifica volunteers collected 3,360 pounds of trash and 405 pounds of recycle. In 2008, 1,204 volunteers picked up 3,543 pounds of trash and 377 pounds of recycle. In 2012, 1,100 volunteers picked up 2,035 pounds of trash and 418 pounds of recycle.

Of all the trash picked up yearly in Pacifica which includes Styrofoam, plastic bags, straws/stirrers, plastic sheeting/tarp, pull tabs, plastic bottles, condoms, diapers, shotgun shells/wadding, batteries, balloons, tires, syringes, fireworks and batteries — the number one item picked up annually is cigarette butts/filters (10,031 in 2005 and 18,169 in 2012, with a grand total of 145,652 for the years 2005 through 2012.) The focus this year is on cigarette butts.

For the 29 days leading up to the 29th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day, the California Coastal Commission has introduced a new item of litter each day, to let everyone know, "why we want it to go extinct and how you can make it happen." One of those items is resealable plastic bags. Why should they go extinct? "They photo-degrade in the sun, breaking into ever smaller plastic particles that become increasingly difficult to clean up. They can be as harmful as plastic grocery bags." How can we help? Wash those bags out and reuse them. When they have been reused as many times as possible, put them in the trash can.

Another big item which should go extinct — balloons. Pretty though they look, helium balloons in particular can float for miles and travel over the ocean until they land with other marine debris and are subsequently mistaken for food. For the animals that ingest them, balloons can be a fatal meal.

Also among the items on the Coastal Commission's wish list for extinction — cigars. "Toxic chemicals can leach out of discarded cigars into our waterways, potentially harming wildlife," the Coastal Commission notes. "Improperly discarded cigars can cause fires destroying habitats for animals, homes and representing high economic costs."

On the Pacifica Beach Coalition's website, there are particular Pacifica "hot spots" listed for this Saturday's

cleanup which include — Crespi Drive, the bike path on Highway 1 between the Moose Lodge and the Quarry, Fairmont Neighborhood streets, streets near Milagra, East Sharp Park Streets, Linda Mar Park and Ride, and "your favorite park, street, or place in need." Additionally, help is needed in Linda Mar for habitat restoration.

Volunteers do not have to register, but groups who want to adopt a specific area, should register on the Beach Coalition's website. To reduce waste, the Beach Coalition asks participants to bring reusable clean up supplies such as bags, buckets, gloves and water bottles. (PBC will also have clean-up supplies available for registered volunteers.) But the bottom line is, if you want to be a part of California's Coastal Cleanup Day, if you want to engage in coastal protection and restoration activities, this day has your name stamped all over it.

"Every year I look out and think there are so many good people," Adams said. "It is wonderful to hear, 'Yes, count me in,' or 'Where can we help?' or 'Where do you need our group to go?'"

"We don't have as many volunteers as Earth Day, though we usually cover the same areas," Adams continued. "And people really dig in and cover a lot. But we're very happy to have as many volunteers as we can. All ages are welcome."

When the cleanup work ends at 11:30, there will be a celebration at Rockaway Beach, which includes light entertainment for an hour or so, and light refreshments provided by Safeway and the Pacifica Beach Coalition.

It may also include a serenade by dolphins or whales, or both. Apparently that phenomenon has happened more times than not on Coastal Cleanup Day. "The most important thing we can do is get the word out," Adams said. "Day after day, time after time, pick up and consider reducing the amount of trash we produce."

California Coastal Cleanup Day, Saturday, Sept. 21, from 9 to 11:30 a.m. There are nearly 40 sites in the Pacifica area where you can volunteer with friends and family. Every beach and bluff, many streets and most creeks will have site captains waiting for your help. For more information and to find the best site to sign up in advance, go to www.pacificabeachcoalition.org.

A waiver form can be downloaded from the website and brought to the event to speed up participation. You can also phone 650-355-1668 to register or write pickituppacific@gmail.com. Immediately following the cleanup, there's a volunteer party at Rockaway Beach.

Separate reminder — up to 5 p.m. on Sept. 26, vote for Lynn Adams, one of three finalists in the Cox Conserves Heroes (CCH) Award, www.ktvu.com/coxconservesheroes.