

Volunteers make Poplar Beach sparkle

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Under cloudy skies on Saturday morning, nearly 35 Coastsiders and employees from Lodi-based Clark Pest Control branches in Belmont, Concord and Lodi, met on Poplar Beach.

Two hours later, the beach was litter-free, and gloved volunteers were sorting through about 20 bright orange, 10-gallon Clark plastic bags. The plastic grocery bags, glass bottles, items of clothing, shoes, cigarette butts, feminine products, Kleenex tissues, receipts and candy wrappers they had found would go into recycling or garbage.

The cleanup was an early commemoration of Earth Day (which is Friday, April 22). Having already held a cleanup in its hometown of Lodi, the company teamed up with the Pacifica Beach Coalition to tackle Poplar Beach.

"This was an attempt to get out in our communities and to be involved with our customers," said Clark Marketing Associate Emily Hill of Lodi, gingerly pulling tattered plastic out of an orange Clark bag and piling it with other plastic items.

She noted that trash ties in directly with the business that employs her. "When there's a lot of trash around, it's harborage for pests. The most simple form of pest control is cleaning up trash."

Cigarette butts were common among items gleaned Saturday.

"They were the big find," said Nicole Keefe of San Jose.

She manned the booth that held supplies and snacks for the volunteers along with goody bags containing brochures, fly swatters, tiny portable ashtrays and hand-sanitizer sprays, key rings and bags of flower seeds. At seven months pregnant, she had opted to be there instead of tramping on the beach.

The day was a bittersweet success, said Hill.

"I think it's interesting - sad, actually - the amount of trash we picked up in two hours," she said, eyeing the piled bags awaiting sorting. "This (beach) is the last horizon before everything goes out into the ocean."

The day would end with a celebration with food, live music and speakers at Linda Mar State Beach in Pacifica, where the volunteers planned to head when the sifting was done.

There were some surprises. Sifters plucked a snail, a spider and an inquisitive young garter snake out of the trash. "He must have been entangled in the stuff we picked up," said Hill's boyfriend, archaeologist Alex Single of Fresno, who released the little snake into beachside brush.

Caring for the environment

Alex Single, of Fresno, who helped clean up Poplar Beach on Saturday, carefully handles a young garter snake before setting it free in its natural habitat. The snake was freed from trash collected during the cleanup.