

Pacifica Beach Coalition leads county's marine debris cleanup

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For a second consecutive year, the Pacifica Beach Coalition (PBC) has been selected by the California Coastal Commission (CCC) to lead the 2014-2015 Japanese Tsunami Marine Debris (JTMD) Program in San Mateo County.

The program's funding will be dispersed by the California State Parks Foundation, the CCC's fiscal agent, and is aimed at supporting local JTMD Cleanup programs from a grant established by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services provided by the Government of Japan as both a thank you for the U.S.'s efforts to assist Japan in the wake of the tsunami, and to help offset the costs associated with removing the tsunami debris from our shores.

A fiberglass skiff possibly from Japan, which may or may not be from the 2011 tsunami disaster, washed ashore at Mussel Rock last August. The PBC site team discovered the skiff and went the extra mile to alert proper authorities to begin to identify and arrange for its removal. It is the third boat to come to shore in California since 2011, and is an example of how the PBC and authorities are reacting as they would to any tsunami-related debris. It was evaluated for radiation, although the risk is unlikely given that the debris entered the ocean days or even weeks before the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant went into meltdown.

Volunteers are invited to join PBC site captains from 9-11 a.m. during four more JTMD-organized cleanups at two designated sites -- Linda Mar State Beach on Sat. Feb. 21 and Mussel Rock on Sat. Apr. 18.

PBC members and beach cleanup volunteers have found a number of items that may have originated during the tsunami, including four huge bulks of Styrofoam from Mussel Rock, Secret Waterfall and Esplanade beaches in 2013. These large pieces also looked like they traveled across the open ocean and could have come from piers or docks. Volunteers also collected a number of fish boxes with Japanese writing and similar barnacle and marine species growing all over the plastic. One of the harms of marine debris is the transfer of species to remote locations where they become invasive due to lack of predators and evolutionary controls. Another problem is that marine debris, especially plastic, often collects toxins along the journey and as it is broken down into smaller and smaller pieces, Marine life ingest the plastic and the toxins.

During cleanups, any potential tsunami debris will be documented and findings reported to the California Coastal Commission and NOAA. Cleanups are open to the public. Registration is encouraged by completing a form and waiver at <http://www.pacificabeachcoalition.org>. Members of the public who may discover potential tsunami debris outside of the organized cleanups should contact the PBC at pickituppacifica@gmail.com before picking up or disposing of any item. For further information about sponsoring these vitally important cleanups, log onto www.pacificabeachcoalition.org, or call (650) 355-1668.