

Volunteers needed to help cleanup beaches, creeks

By Julia Scott
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PACIFICA — When it comes to Coastal Cleanup Day, Lynn Adams has discovered that it's not enough to pick up trash along the beach once a year. She has taken to scouring streets for cigarette butts, and she once found 600 of them along the sidewalks of a single city block.

"Unfortunately, people are using the ground as an ashtray," she said. "All it takes is one rain event for those to end up in the ocean. That's how it gets to the beaches."

She should know.

As executive director of the Pacifica Beach Coalition since 2005, she has seen the amount of overall litter that Coastal Cleanup Day volunteers collect — from plastic bottles to pieces of glass, cigarette butts and food wrappers — increase heavily over time.

It is not just because more people volunteer each year and end up collecting more litter. It is the fact that not enough people are getting the message that their actions have a serious and lasting effect downstream, especially in winter when the rain pushes stray litter into storm drains and straight out to the ocean.

Take bags, for instance. Coastal Cleanup volunteers in Pacifica collected 3,119 paper and plastic bags in 2007, compared to 287 bags in 2005.

"We've become more and more reliant on plastic bags. They're blowing into our environment from our cars and trucks, and there's nowhere for them to go," Adams said. "Where they're not getting snagged, they're getting blowing into the water and disappearing."

As each year brings more litter to the beaches and creeksides of San Mateo County, an increasingly robust army of volunteers has proved they are up to the task.

This year's 24th annual California Coastal Cleanup Day is from 9 a.m. to noon Saturday and is likely to be the most well-attended one ever, according to Dean Peterson, director of the county's Environmental Health Services Division.

From 2005 to 2007, countywide participation in Coastal Cleanup Day jumped 33 percent, according to Peterson.

"I think more people are getting out and identifying those areas (that need help)," he said. "There's more of an outreach push to get people involved with it."

The number of sites slated for cleanups has also expanded significantly, and the list now includes nearly as many bayside creeks as coastside beaches. Belmont, Redwood City and San Mateo all will host volunteers at problem sites, as well as more traditional cleanups at several locations in Half Moon Bay, Pacifica and Pescadero. Last year, a total of 2,184 volunteers covered more than 50 miles of shoreline and picked up roughly 20,000 tons of trash — enough to fill a small cargo ship.

Efforts are underway at the state level to control the amount of litter in general, and plastic debris in particular, that reaches the ocean each year.

The Ocean Protection Council, a state committee established in 2004, is developing a strategy that calls for a statewide ban on plastic bags and for establishing a take-back program for certain kinds of plastics and food packaging that could be recycled by the companies that made them. The council's latest report says that according to the Progressive Bag Alliance, 19 billion plastic grocery bags are distributed in California every year — but fewer than 5 percent of them are recycled.

The group also would like to work toward developing non-toxic, biodegradable packaging alternatives to Styrofoam and other materials, and it has suggested assessing a fee on certain disposable items, such as fast food to-go cups, to make customers think about bringing their own.

To volunteer for a Coastal Cleanup Day project, go to www.flowstobay.org/cs_litter_reduction.php.

Reach Julia Scott can at 650-348-4340 or julia.scott@bayareanewsgroup.com.

24th annual California Coastal Cleanup Day

When: 9 a.m. to noon Saturday

Where: Locations vary (see below). Visit www.flowstobay.org/cs_litter_reduction.php for details on where to meet.

Bayside locations:

- Belmont Creek. Contact: Jozi Plut, city of Belmont, 650-595-7425.
- Brisbane Lagoon. Contact: Russ Carmick, city of Brisbane, 415-508-2143.
- Burlingame Bayfront. Contact: Muriel Carrieri and Eva Justimbaste, city of Burlingame, 650-342-3727.
- San Francisquito Creek. (East Palo Alto). Contact: Arnie Thompson, 650-962-9876, Ext. 310.
- Mills Creek (Millbrae). Contact: Catherine Allin, city of Millbrae, 650-259-2397.
- Cordilleras Creek and others (Redwood City). Contact: Barbara Patterson, 650-701-0630.
- Redwood Creek and others (Redwood City). Contact: Deanna LaCroix, 650-780-7308.

Coyote Point State Park (San Mateo). Contact: Robert Kilona, 650-573-2592.

Laurel Creek (San Mateo). Contact: Julie Colvin, 650-372-6291.

Ryder Park (San Mateo). Contact: Roxanne Murray, 650-522-7346.

Coastside locations:

Thornton State Beach (Daly City). Contact: David and Shelly Sondergeld, 415-602-6847.

Mavericks Beach (Half Moon Bay). Contact: Joao De Macedo, 415-462-6200.

Francis State Beach (Half Moon Bay). Contact: Steve Bacosa and REI, 650-969-1938.

Poplar and Redondo beaches (Half Moon Bay). Contact: Amelia Peters, 650-766-1464

Pillar Point Harbor. Contact: Aaron Tinker, 650-364-2760, Ext. 16

Mirada Surf West (Miramar). Contact: Sarah Lenz, 650-728-3584.

Montara State Beach. Contact: Kevin and Wendy Stokes, kevin@montarabeach.com.

Pacifica (San Pedro Creek, Esplanade Beach, Sharp Park Beach, Pacifica State Beach, Rockaway Beach). Contact: Lynn Adams, Pacifica Beach Coalition, 650-355-1668.

Pescadero State Beach. Contact: Gregory Bahr, 650-879-0299.

Pistachio Beach (Pescadero). Contact: Rose Blackburn, 650-726-8804, Ext. 4

San Gregorio State Beach. Contact: Neil Panton, 650-726-2499.