



# Organizing a Cleanup 101



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**VOLUNTEER  
CLEANUP  
.ORG**



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# Planning



**As a Cleanup Host, you are responsible for organizing and facilitating the activities that occur at a specific cleanup site on the day of your event. You will be managing your own individual cleanup event with some logistical and programmatic support from us.**

- Choose a location suitable for your group size and age.
- Inland locations or other areas where there are mangroves, riprap or rocky shorelines there will be lots of trapped debris. Many beaches are actually well maintained by county sanitation workers, but you will likely find mostly microplastics.
- Some locations require permissions or event permits from the local authorities which we can help advise.
- If you are doing a shoreline site, consult the tide-charts to decide a time for your event and whether high tide will impact your event timing. Aim for low tide or at least 2-3 hours outside of HIGH tide for better access to the shoreline and marine debris.
- Visit your chosen site before the cleanup and assess it so that you can become familiar, know where to set up the registration table, how many people it can accommodate, and whether the site has on-site waste disposal, bathrooms and water fountain.
- Check for other cleanups scheduled at your location to refrain from overlap.



# Proposed Schedule for a 2-hour Cleanup

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1. Arrival/check-in (15 minutes)
2. Introduction, safety briefing, explain tasks, distribute supplies (15 minutes)
3. Cleanup (1 hour)
4. Educational debrief, count/weigh bags, take group photo (30 minutes)
5. Haul trash away, sign community service forms, pack up supplies





# Posting Your Cleanup



- Post your event to [VolunteerCleanup.org](https://www.volunteercleanup.org) to promote your cleanup, recruit volunteers, and collect registrations.
  - Unless you mark your event as private, your cleanup will be listed on our website publicly.
  - If private, your event will only be visible to those you share your event link with.
  - Add 'Tickets' to collect registrations.
    - Set a maximum number of tickets to manage capacity.
    - Registrations will be sent to the organizer's email address.
  - Use the unique URL that our website generates to share via email and social media.
    - Remind volunteers to RSVP so you can be prepared for estimated turnout.
- Each Tuesday, an email blast goes out to all registered volunteers in our database, notifying them of cleanups within a 15-mile radius. For best turnout, we recommend listing your event at least 3 weeks before your event so it appears in several email blasts prior to your event.



# Supplies



Most commonly used supplies during cleanups.  
(Click on numbers for links.)

1

## REUSABLE GLOVES

Nitrile coated gloves give proper protection and can be washed and **reused!**



2

## GARBAGE BAGS AND/OR BUCKETS

- Bags can be difficult to manage in wind. We use buckets for collecting and then consolidate them into CLEAR bags when full.
- You can get buckets from many local restaurants. Try asking a Chinese restaurant, fast food burger place or Dunkin Donuts as they get their deliveries in 5-gallon buckets. They can be **REUSED!**



3

## WATER COOLER

Reduce the need for single-use disposable plastic bottled water, where possible. Encourage volunteers to bring their own reusable water bottle! A 2-gallon container will have enough water for about 20-30 volunteers and costs about \$20.



4

## HAND SANITIZER, SUNSCREEN, INSECT REPELLENT



# Supplies



Additional helpful supplies.  
(Click on numbers for links.)

## 5 BASIC FIRST AID KIT

for minor cuts, scrapes  
(should have band aids,  
alcohol swaps,  
antibiotic ointment)



## 6 LUGGAGE WEIGHT SCALE

for weighing garbage bags - otherwise, you can estimate 10lbs per bag, if 13-gallon kitchen size bag



## 7 COMMUNITY SERVICE FORMS

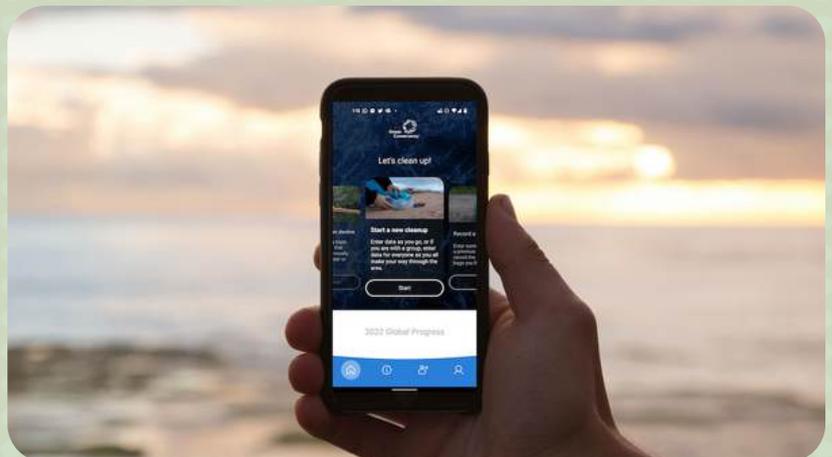
If you need, we have a template you can print that is pre-signed by us. We can only give community service hours electronically after the volunteer emails us a picture of them at the cleanup.



## 8 CLEANSWELL APP

Download the Ocean Conservancy's CleanSwell app for more detailed data gathering to log, tally and measure the impact of your cleanup. With Clean Swell, the data you collect will upload to Ocean Conservancy's global ocean trash database in real time. Participants can earn badges for their efforts as they remove more and more trash and then share their Cleanup results right from the app with friends via Facebook, Twitter, and email. You can also use a group ID to track your collective impact.

<https://oceanconservancy.org/news/clean-swell-2-0/>



# Supply DON'TS



Here's the lowdown on all the stuff that really shouldn't crash your cleanup party!

## PLASTIC WATER BOTTLES

Leach plastic chemicals into the water when exposed to heat and insulated bottles keep water cold!



## DISPOSABLE GLOVES

No protection for hands as they break easily and these are not REUSABLE!



## PLASTIC IN CATERING

If providing food or beverages for volunteers, avoid working with caterers or suppliers who rely on single-use plastics like straws, cutlery, plates, or cups. Instead, choose caterers who use compostable, biodegradable, or reusable alternatives, and encourage volunteers to bring their own reusable dining ware.



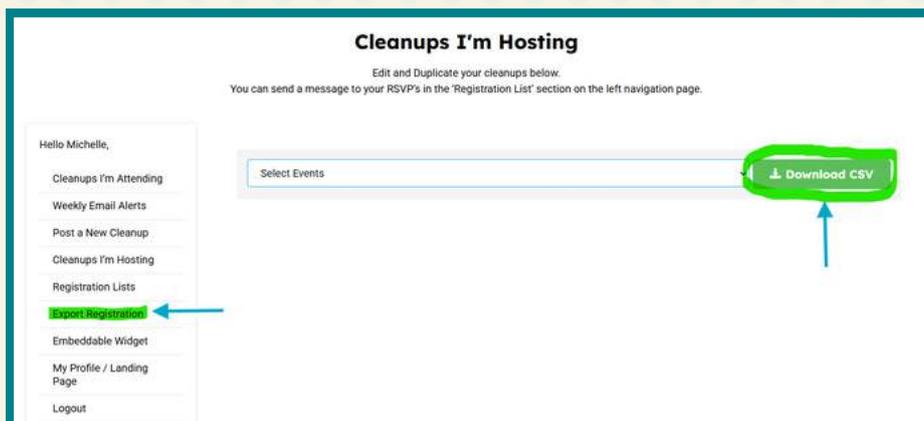
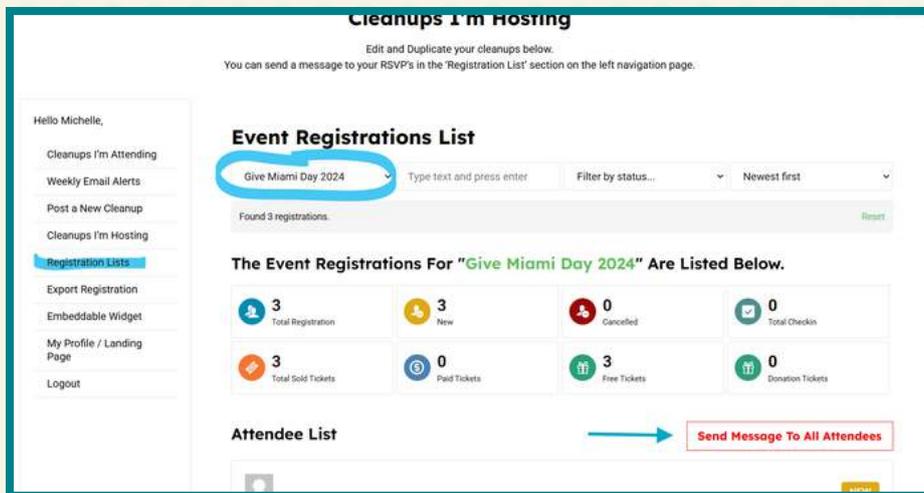
## INCORRECT FOOTWEAR

Specify the appropriate footwear for the terrain you will be cleaning on. For shorelines, rocky terrains, etc. close-toed shoes are required.



# 2 Days Before the Event

Send a reminder email to volunteers a few days before the event. Include details about the cleanup, such as where to meet, what to bring (reusable water bottle and close-toed shoes), and any waivers they need to sign. You can message volunteers through our platform or alternatively, export all registrants' contact information to email them separately.





# Day of Cleanup



- Welcome and thank volunteers for coming out and helping make our waterways cleaner.
- Have volunteers sign waivers as they arrive (if necessary).
- Give the Safety Briefing (below).
- Give volunteers instructions.
  - Pick a central starting point. Send half volunteers to the left and half to the right to evenly cover terrain.
  - Set a pre-determined time for everyone to be back.
- Distribute gloves and buckets/bags.
  - If running low on gloves, give single glove per person for the hand they use to pick up trash.
  - Do not distribute supplies UNTIL the waiver has been verified/collected.
  - For big groups, encourage volunteers to work in groups of 2-3. For example, one person with gloves, another with bucket/bag, and another logging data on CleanSwell app.
- Lead a Post-Clean Up Debrief (below).
- Tally the bags (# of bags and weight).
- Take a group photo and share on social media.
- Remind volunteers to sign up for weekly notifications of local cleanup events at [VolunteerCleanup.org](https://www.volunteercleanup.org).





# Miscellaneous Tips



- Take BEFORE pictures - demonstrates what the shoreline looked like before clean up.
- If you are choosing to recycle collected debris, have volunteers focus on obvious “low hanging fruit” recyclables like clean plastic water/soda bottles, aluminum cans, and glass bottles.
  - You may choose to separate recyclables from other trash however you wish. We recommend having volunteers set aside recyclable items as they are cleaning away from the shoreline/onto the grass. Towards the end of the cleanup, send a few volunteers to do a sweep and collect the recyclable items into separate clear garbage bags. Empty recycling into bins WITHOUT the plastic bag.
- If there are young kids, assign them specific tasks like collecting just the bottle caps, or straws, or cigarette butts. Make it like a scavenger hunt!
- Add a contest for strangest item found with eco-friendly prizes (i.e reusable utensil set).
- Stage the group photo nicely with a beautiful background. Arrange the bags in the front so it’s easy to see the volume. Volunteers can stand behind the bags. Ask a passerby to take a photo.

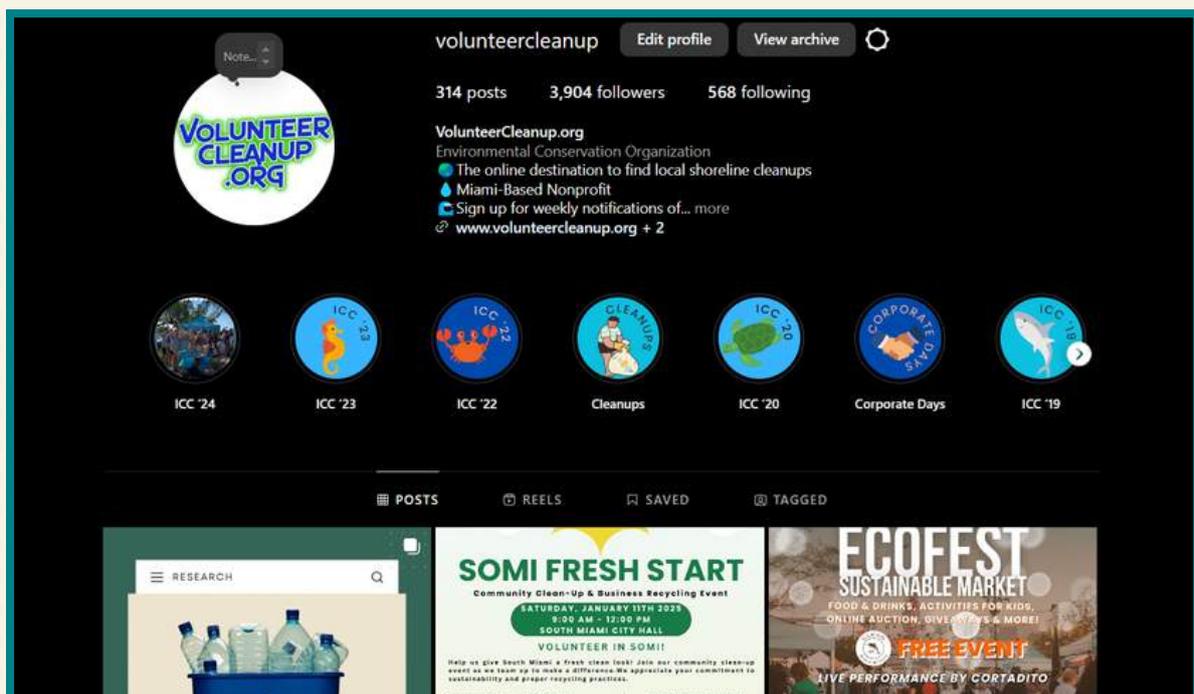


# After the Cleanup

## Post to social media

- Post photos to social media including the number of volunteers, number of bags, and total weight of debris collected.
- Tag us on Instagram ([@volunteercleanup](https://www.instagram.com/volunteercleanup)) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/volunteercleanup/>).

Share photos with volunteer participants so they can post as well!



# Talking Points



## Introductory Remarks



Introduce yourself, your team, your organization and why you decided to organize this cleanup.

Our oceans are facing a marine debris crisis. It is the 2nd most important environmental threat after sea level rise and climate change.

Today you will have a chance to experience the severity of the plastic waste problem and discuss what we can all do about it.



# Talking Points



Volunteers are participating at their own risk, and assume all liability. We want volunteers to be safe and have an enjoyable volunteer experience.

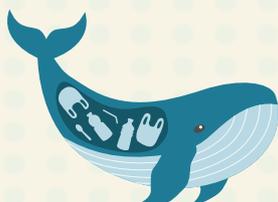
This isn't a dangerous activity but there are a few potential hazards to keep in mind, mostly sharp objects:

- Rocks, glass and sometimes hypodermic needles.
  - Volunteers should not touch a needle! If needles are found, volunteers must contact host. If the host desires, the best disposal method is to put needle in a wide-mouth plastic bottle and put the cap back on to prevent harm to anyone else and throw bottle away.
  - Do NOT put needle in a plastic bag where it can poke out and graze someone.
- Branches can cause scrapes so careful in the mangroves.
- Be careful when climbing on rocks:
  - If working on rocky terrain, always have one hand free to break fall if needed.
  - Stay low to climb over rocks with hands and feet.

## Safety Briefing



You should brief volunteers on safety precautions, explaining potential hazards and how to avoid them, as well as reminding them that they are responsible for their actions and assume all liability.



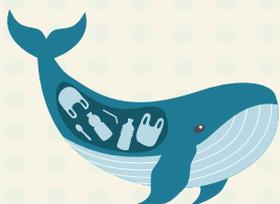
# Talking Points



## Safety Briefing



You should brief volunteers on safety precautions, explaining potential hazards and how to avoid them, as well as reminding them that they are responsible for their actions and assume all liability.



First aid kit is available for any minor cuts and scrapes.

Stay hydrated and wear sunscreen.

Advise of any other hazards at your specific site (i.e jelly fish).

Always LOOK before picking up.

Don't touch anything that makes you uncomfortable (i.e medical waste).

Focus on familiar man-made items, mostly plastic. Leave natural debris such as leaves, branches, dead animals, etc.



# Talking Points

## Post-Cleanup Educational Debrief

The guidelines provide a flexible framework for engaging volunteers in post-cleanup discussions, focusing on making the experience enjoyable and interactive. The aim is for volunteers to understand the issue deeply and leave with actionable insights, emphasizing that the cleanup is an opportunity for education and behavioral change, not just trash collection. Organizers are encouraged to incorporate their own ideas along with relevant local information.

1



### Ice Breaker Questions

What are your reactions to what you saw today? What did you think? More or less trash than you expected? What kind of weird things did you find?

### Quantify the Problem

There are 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic in the ocean:

- At our current rate, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by weight in 2050.
- For each person on Earth, there are 21,000 pieces of trash.
- Every minute there are 2 full truckloads of plastic waste going into the ocean.
- There are more pieces of plastic in the ocean than there are stars in our galaxy.

2



### Common Types of Marine Debris

What items were the most commonly found during the cleanup? What do these items have in common?

They are single-use, plastic, and food/beverage related.

Straws: In the U.S alone, 1/2 billion used daily.

Plastic bottles: 60 million plastic bottles in landfills, incinerators, or the environment every day (internationally).



# Talking Points

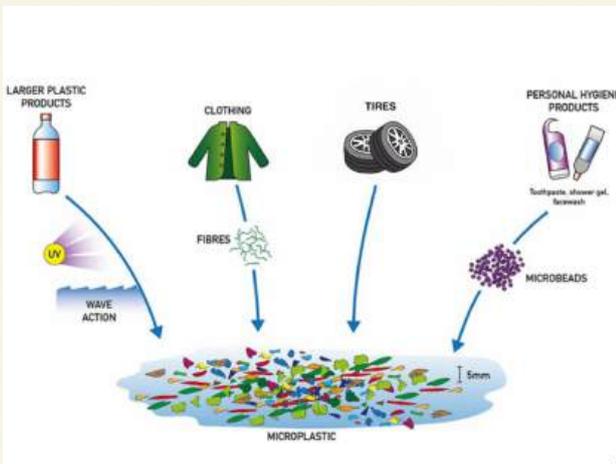
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## Cigarette Butts

Used to be #1 most littered item in the world and most commonly found item (now it's bottle caps). Contrary to popular belief they are not made of cotton or paper. They are PLASTIC and not biodegradable. If you smoke, or know someone who does, please do not throw your cigarette butts on the street!

4



## Microplastics

Tiny pieces of plastic that eroded over time from larger pieces through wave action, UV rays, and salt in the water.

- Primary: 19 to 31% of microplastics in the ocean. directly released into nature as small particles. come mainly from land activities & cosmetics like facial scrubs, car tires, and laundry of synthetic clothing
- Secondary: 69 to 81% of microplastics in the ocean. originate from large pieces of plastic that fragment into smaller pieces in nature like bottles, bags, or fishing nets

5

## Storm Drains lead to Waterways



13th and Washington, Miami Beach, FL

## Sources of Marine Debris

Where do you think this trash comes from and how did it get into the ocean and our shorelines?

80% of marine debris is from land based sources. Only 20% comes from boaters or fishing and water based activities. And, it ALL comes from us!

- It often begins as street litter, and blows or flows into the storm drains and directly out to canals, into the bay and finally into the ocean – all waterways are connected and lead to the ocean!
- Even street litter far away from the ocean can become ocean trash.
- The tidal patterns deposit the marine debris onto our shorelines where at low-tide, we have the opportunity to gather it before it flows back out again.



# Talking Points

6



Willyam Bradberry

## Problems and Consequences

Why should we be concerned about this problem? What are the consequences?

### Impacts to marine life

52% of sea turtles are eating plastic.

7



MEDASSET

Who knows what sea turtles eat? Jellyfish! They look like plastic bags when floating in the ocean.

What other trash might look like a jelly fish when floating in the ocean? Balloons! They are rubber jellyfish. What goes up....must come down. Balloons pop in the upper atmosphere and land in the ocean.

Can anyone tell me why they end up in the ocean and not on land? There is more ocean that covers the Earth than land. 71% of the Earth's is water.

8



An albatross on an uninhabited island in the Pacific - Chris Jordan

This is an albatross found on an uninhabited island that died from malnutrition because its stomach was too full of plastic that it could not digest. 100% of seabirds are eating plastic.

If birds and sea turtles are eating plastic, what might that mean for us? If animals are eating this plastic and we eat food from the ocean, we are eating it too!



# Talking Points

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## Human Health

Plastic chemicals are known endocrine disruptors (they mess with your hormones) which leads to various effects. These are especially dangerous and impactful for youth in their development.

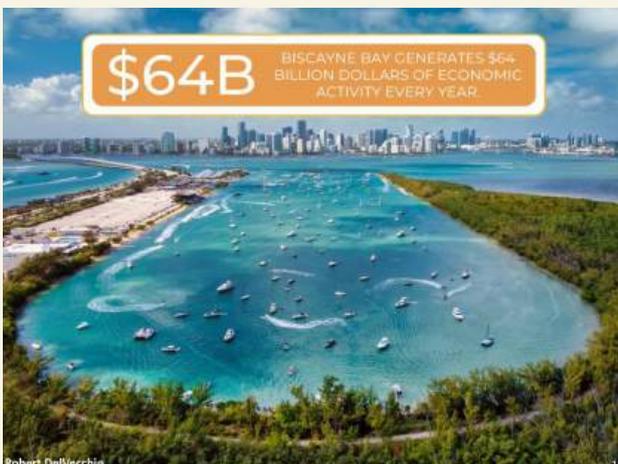
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## Entrapment

Other animals like sea lions and dolphins get entangled in fishing nets and lines. Most of the great Pacific Gyre trash is nets and lines from fishing industry.

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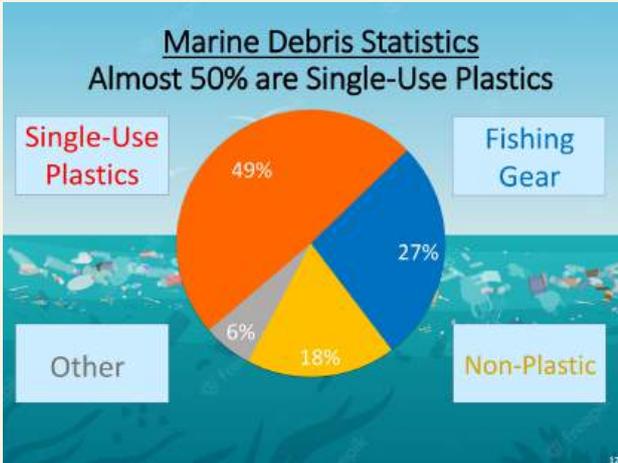
## Tourism

Marine debris also threatens tourism and real estate economies (the biggest economies in South Florida)! Biscayne Bay brings in an annual revenue of \$64 billion.



# Talking Points

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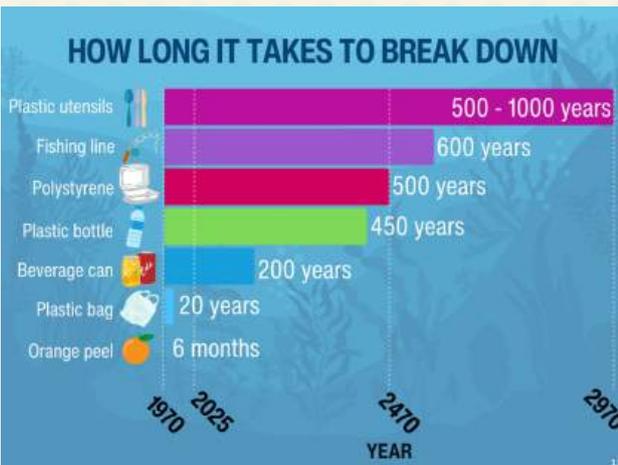


## Single-Use

Highlight single use and fishing gear.

What does *single-use plastic* mean? Items used for a very short amount of time but they last far longer on our planet.

13



Who knows when plastic was invented?

Invented in WWII era and became commercially popular in the 70s.

What does this entail if it's only been about 50-60 years?

As it takes hundreds of years to break down, this means that all plastics ever made, unless incinerated, are still on the planet today.

14



As a society, we rely too much on single use plastics and items of convenience. If we didn't use so much disposable plastic, we wouldn't have this problem.

- Additionally, our over reliance on single use plastics is contributing to sea level rise.
- Plastics are made by burning fossil fuels which release Co2 into the atmosphere which leads to climate change.



# Talking Points

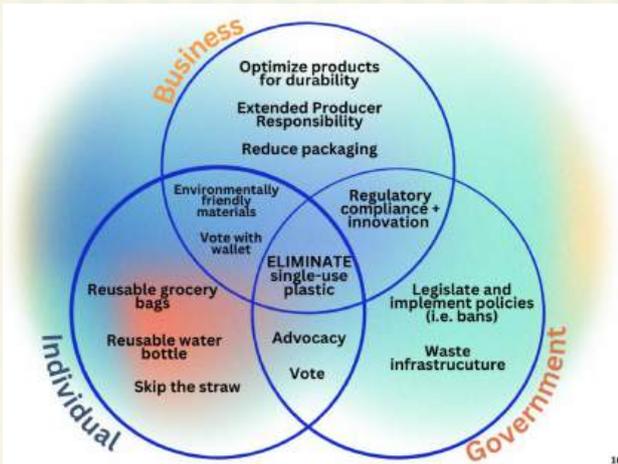
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## Bathtub Metaphor

We can't clean our way out of this mess. If your bathtub was overflowing, you wouldn't grab a mop or a bucket to heave out the water – you would turn off the tap. That is what we must do for plastic – turn off the tap on plastic production.

16



What should we do about this?

Cleanups are not the answer! Plastic will continue to enter our environment and each day wash up on shore with the tides. The most important thing we can do to prevent marine debris is **REDUCE** single-use plastic consumption and dispose of trash properly.

What changes can we make in our personal lives? (Individual Responsibility)

- Bring your own reusable bags to the store.
- Carry and refill a reusable water bottle
- Skip the straw when ordering a beverage at a bar or restaurant.
  - Simply tell the server "No straw please, I am protecting the oceans." #strawssuck #stopsucking
  - Skip a straw, save a turtle!
- Influence Others around you: Be an Activist and Advocate!

What can your work place do to reduce single use plastics?

- Ask restaurants you patronize to phase out Styrofoam in their to-go packaging and switch to more sustainable, environmentally friendly options.
- Every kitchen has aluminum foil, highly recyclable and a great alternative to plastic or Styrofoam take out container. Ask kitchen to wrap your leftovers in aluminum instead!
- Vote with our wallet. Support companies that protect the environment, and follow sustainable business practices.
- Advocate and vote for candidates who support Clean Water policies!



# Talking Points

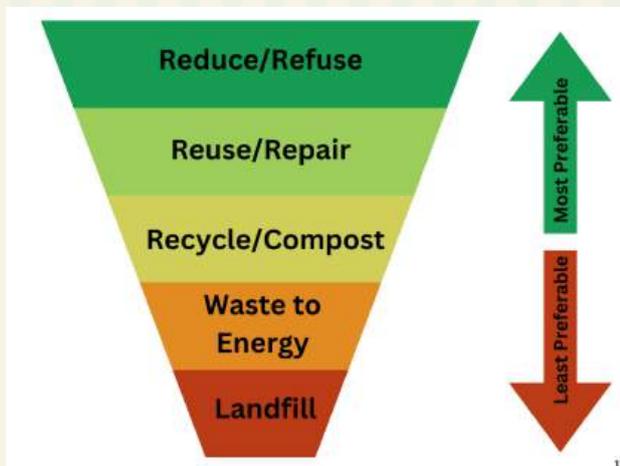
## Government Responsibility

- Legislate and implement sensible policies, bans where appropriate.
- Infrastructure, well designed garbage cans that do not allow trash to blow out, recycling

## Business Responsibility

- Restaurants and business owners to opt for environmentally friendly materials.
- Extended Producer Responsibility

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## Hierarchy

REFUSE, Reduce, Reuse single use plastics. The new "r" is refuse. There is a reason why recycle is last in the RRR mantra - it's the LAST resort!

- The plastics recycling industry is in crisis. China is not taking our trash anymore.

18



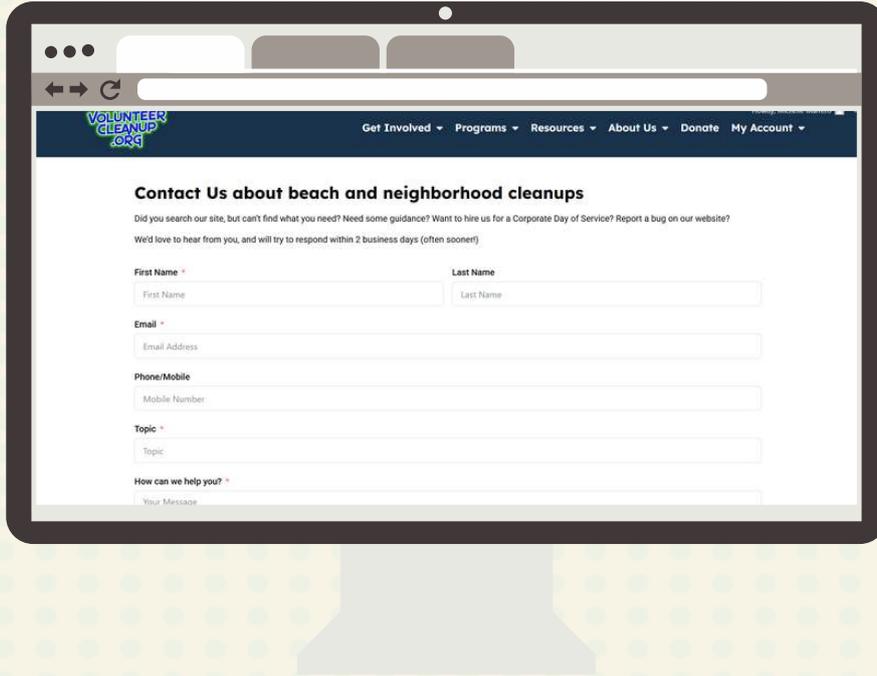
## Summary

FIND THESE SLIDES AND MORE AT  
[VOLUNTEERCLEANUP.ORG/CLEANUP-ORGANIZER-RESOURCES](http://VOLUNTEERCLEANUP.ORG/CLEANUP-ORGANIZER-RESOURCES)

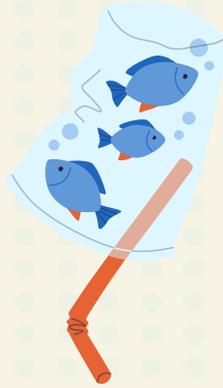
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