



Photo: NOAA

Marine Debris in the Northeast

The Northeast, with its long-standing heritage of commercial fishing, is home to industrialized coastlines, city centers, popular tourist destinations, diverse habitats, and protected species. While the picturesque Northeast coast is impacted both economically and environmentally by marine debris ranging from consumer waste to derelict fishing gear, it is also home to dozens of organizations seeking solutions and taking action.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) Northeast region encompasses Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. In the region, the MDP collaborates with fishing communities, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and local agencies to research, remove, and prevent marine debris.

Marine Debris Impacts in the NE

- Urban population centers in the Northeast result in large amounts of mismanaged trash, especially single-use plastics, that move from land into the ocean.
- Derelict fishing gear, or gear that is lost at sea, can continue to trap marine life, create navigational hazards, place financial stress on fisheries, and damage habitat.
- Hurricane and storm-generated debris can pose hazards to navigation and impact fisheries and sensitive ecosystems.



Photo: NOAA

Marine Debris Initiatives in the Northeast

The following are recent projects funded by the MDP. For more, visit <https://marinedebris.noaa.gov>.

Prevention

Researchers at Keene State College (NH) and the University of New Haven (CT) are using multimedia text messaging to deliver persuasive, positive, humorous messages focused on proper cigarette butt disposal to college students living near National Estuary Programs across the US. Their hope is to change cigarette butt littering behavior of student smokers for the protection of ocean ecosystems.

Removal

Islands present unique challenges in marine debris removal. Access is often limited by sea state or area closures. The National Audubon Society is working on eight Maine islands to remove marine debris, study island accumulation, and, in partnership with the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation and local lobster harvesters, reduce the rate of accumulation through at-sea removal of derelict fishing gear. The Center for Coastal Studies, located in Provincetown, MA, has obtained special permits to mobilize volunteers including commercial and recreational fishers, middle school students, the Environmental Police, private and municipal solid waste disposal providers, surfers, and other coastal interest groups to identify, document, and properly dispose of derelict fishing gear from Cape Cod Bay and the Cape Cod National Seashore.

Research

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution is conducting fieldwork and laboratory experiments to calculate the risk of microplastic ingestion to scallop populations. The University of Connecticut is conducting research to determine the types and concentrations of microplastics ingested by oysters, how the characteristics of plastic influence ingestion of the particles, and the effects of microplastic ingestion on the digestive processes of oysters.



Cigarette butts are the most common item found during beach cleanups.



Lobstermen work to remove an old lobster trap from Massachusetts waters.



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Regional Coordination

The MDP has regional coordinators across the United States to ensure stakeholders have the best information available.

3 Easy Steps to Keep the NE Free of Debris

1 Make Sustainable Choices
Marine debris is a human-caused problem, but it also has human solutions. Make sustainable choices to reduce everyday waste, reuse materials where possible, and recycle.

2 Fish and Boat Responsibly
Bring all trash back to shore for proper disposal and be sure to monitor gear regularly. Look for monofilament recycling bins located on docks and piers.

3 Prepare for Storms
Hurricanes and winter storms can move materials from land into waterways. Before a storm, secure backyard, boating, and fishing equipment to prevent it from becoming marine debris.