

Marine and coastal litter

Why is marine and coastal litter a problem?

Coastal and marine litter impacts the aesthetics of a beach whilst causing a hazard to human health. Litter can also have an economic impact. In addition to its effects on local communities and visitors, beach and marine litter can also have devastating effects on coastal and marine wildlife.

Beach litter makes a beach look unattractive and dirty. Even worse, sewage related litter, such as sanitary items, implies that the surrounding water is contaminated by sewage. These not only pose a health risk to the users of



the beach but also deters visitors, impacting on revenue earned by local economy through visitors and tourists. This isn't the only economic impact - marine litter also effects the fishing industry through lost revenue as a result of time and effort spent clearing debris from nets and from damage to fishing gear. Beach litter also costs each local authority thousands of pounds each year through clean-up efforts.



One of the most distressing impacts beach and marine litter has is the threat it poses to marine wildlife. Millions of birds and thousands of marine mammals die globally each year as a result of ingestion and entanglement (Laist, 1997).

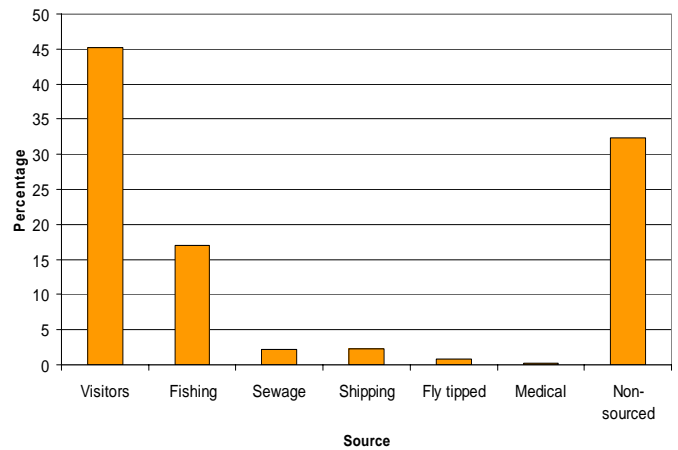
Marine litter is often ingested when it is mistaken for food. This leads to damage of the digestive tract or blockage of the food passage and unless removed will result in the death of an animal through infection and/or starvation. Discarded fishing nets and lines, plastic bags and six-pack carriers are common forms of litter that often result in the death of many marine birds and animals. These deaths result from lethal cuts and wounds or through drowning and starvation when the debris restricts. A particular problem in Kent is the abandonment of fixed shore netting, which entangles marine life. Litter can also affect the marine ecosystem, through prevention of light and nutrient reaching bottom dwelling organisms and damage to the seabed.

Why monitor marine and coastal litter?

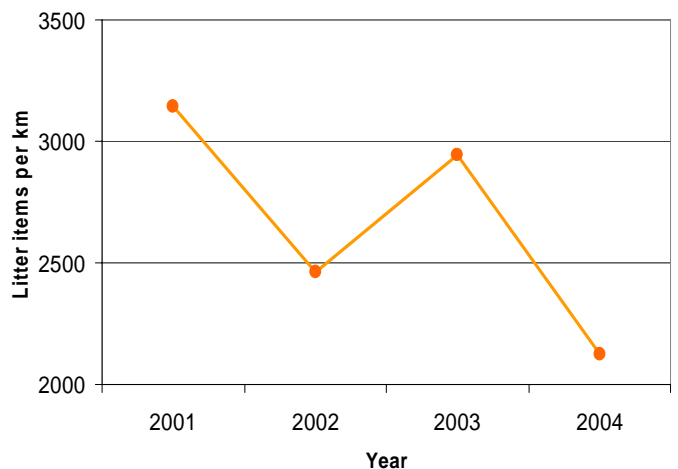
It is important to monitor litter in order to identify the main sources of litter generation and thereby put in place suitable management practices and policies to reduce marine and coastal litter. Monitoring also assists in the evaluation of existing management. In the UK the Marine Conservation Society organises the Beachwatch campaign, an annual clean up and assessment of beach litter.

Sources of beach and marine litter for Kent 2004

The Kent Beachwatch survey in 2004 showed that the main contributor to litter on the county's beaches was direct littering by recreational beach users, accounting for 45.25% of litter. Other sources included fishing 16.98%, sewage 2.17% and shipping 2.29%. The graph below shows the results of Kent's 2004 Beachwatch surveys.



In total, the survey collected 12,208 items of litter, which equates to 2,123 items of litter per km. This is a reduction on the three past years, as can be seen from the graph below.



Facts and figures

- Coastal and marine litter costs a total of £14 billion per year on clean up and kills millions of birds and thousands of marine mammals globally.
- In 2004 there were 2,123 items of litter per km in Kent, a 28% reduction on the 2003 figure.
- In Kent beach users are the largest source of litter, contributing 45.25% of beach debris.
- 11 beaches in Kent have been adopted as part of the Adopt A Beach scheme.
- 3 beaches in Kent have been awarded the Blue Flag and all are in the Margate area.
- 17 beaches in Kent have been awarded the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Recommended Beach.
- 15 beaches in Kent have been awarded the ENCAMS Seaside Award.

Tackling coastal litter

As previously mentioned, coastal local authorities spend thousands of pounds each year clearing up coastal litter. In addition to these efforts the Adopt-A-Beach scheme enables local communities to assist in the battle against coastal litter. The aim of the scheme is for local individuals, groups and communities to take action to improve the quality of their local beach for everyone to enjoy. All those involved in the project do so on an entirely voluntary basis. This work not only raises awareness and promotes action to reduce beach litter but the litter surveys provide the data for Beachwatch.

In Kent, 11 beaches have been adopted:

- Botany Bay
- Margate Main Sands
- Margate Main West
- Ramsgate Main Sands
- Riverside country park
- Rushenden
- Sandwich bay
- St Mildreds Bay
- Stone Bay
- Viking Bay Sands
- Walpole



What makes a good beach?

Everyone has their own idea of what makes a good beach, depending on their own personal preferences. In England there are three beach award schemes, each applying different criteria for beach management and water quality standards.

Blue Flag Award - awarded to well developed resort beaches, with good facilities, employing environmentally sensitive management practices, and promoting public awareness of the coast. Bathing water quality must achieve the EC Guideline standard.

3 awarded in Kent, 2005: Minnis Bay, Westbrook and Westgate

Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Recommended Beach - this award only addresses water quality and does not grade anything else. To achieve this award 100% of water quality samples pass the EC Mandatory Standard and 80% or more of the samples pass the EC Guideline Total & Faecal Coliform Standard.

17 awarded in Kent, 2005: Dover Harbour, Dymchurch, Fulsam Rock, Hampton Pier West, Hythe Beach, Joss Bay, Minnis Bay, Reculver Beach, Sandgate, Sandwich Bay, Shakespeare Beach, St Margaret's Bay, St Mary's Bay, Tankerton Beach, Westgate, Westbrook, Whitstable West Beach.

ENCAMS Seaside Award - awarded to well-managed beaches which are clean and relatively safe. There are two award categories: resort and rural. A resort beach must fulfil 29 criteria and a rural beach 13, one of which refers to water quality which must comply with the mandatory standard of the Bathing Water Directive.

15 awarded in Kent, 2005: Botany Bay, Herne Bay West, Joss Bay, Leysdown Beach, Margate Main Sands, Minnis Bay, Ramsgate Main Sands, Reculver, Sheerness Beach Street, Minster Leas, St Mildreds Bay, Tankerton, Walpole Bay, West Bay, Westbrook Bay. In 2007, this award will be replaced by the Quality Coast Award.

Key to map:

- Beach with Blue Flag, ENCAMS and MSC award.
- Beach with MSC award.
- Beach with ENCAMS award.



Sources of information:

- www.adoptabeach.org.uk
- www.blueflag.org
- www.seasideawards.org.uk
- www.goodbeachguide.co.uk
- www.vliz.be/projects/SAIL/

