Turtle Trash Collectors
Handbook
Your guide to making the ocean a safer place for sea turtles.
The Bad News:

Marine debris, or trash that ends up in the ocean, has major impacts of all kinds of marine animals, especially sea turtles.

These iconic animals can confuse plastic bags and balloons for jellyfish, their favorite food. Any debris that ends up in their system can get stuck, making the turtle feel full so that they stop eating. They can also swallow fishing hooks and even get caught in fishing nets!

Since sea turtles are endangered species, we need to find a way to protect them from the impacts of marine debris.

The Good News:

You can help! Our actions play a big role in the fate of the oceans and our beloved sea turtles! Just by making three easy changes in your life you can help make our planet a safer place for our sea turtles and ourselves:

1. Reduce how much plastic you use every day. Opt for reusable water bottles, coffee cups, and food containers.

2. Help clean up your community. Pick up trash that you see when you are outside to make sure it does not end up in the ocean.

3. Join our Turtle Trash Collector badge program to earn badges for your efforts!
What is marine debris?

Marine debris is any kind of trash that ends up in the ocean. Trash can get to the ocean in many ways, but the main way is through human pollution on land. Trash in our parks, on our beaches, and in our communities can make their way into waterways that lead to the ocean. There are also ocean-based sources of debris, including fishing activity, offshore drilling, and cargo ships.

Marine debris comes in many shapes and sizes. It can be as big as a lost or abandoned fishing vessel, as small as a microbead from a rinse off face wash, and anything in between. When plastics get into the ocean, they will start to break into smaller and smaller pieces, but they never go away completely. Marine debris can be found everywhere in the ocean, from the surface to the floor. It collects in areas of ocean circulation called gyres and forms patches of higher amounts of debris.

Why is it bad?

Once this debris gets to the ocean, it can cause a lot of problems for the animals that live there. Animals can be entangled in our trash, which can cause them to drown or affect their health over time. Marine animals sometimes eat marine debris, which can make them feel full so they stop eating other, healthy food. This debris can carry toxins, which can build up in our food chains. Marine debris can also damage underwater habitats and ecosystems.

Marine debris is also a major problem for people! It can clog up our waterways, making it hard for water to drain during storms and causing flooding. It can cause problems for boat transportations. Trash on our beaches can be dangerous for beach goers and is bad for our economy in coastal communities. Marine debris and toxins can even be in the seafood we eat!

The good news about marine debris is that we know the source of the problem... it’s us! Anything people use everyday can become marine debris if we don’t dispose of it properly or if it flies into the water by accident. It is up to each and every one of us to keep items from becoming marine debris!
Become a Turtle Trash Collector

Sign up! Collect trash! Save the world!

1. Sign up
Visit our website and click on “How to Become a Turtle Trash Collector.” You will need to provide an email address and answer a few questions about marine debris, so grab an adult or older sibling to help you!

2. Collect debris
You will need to collect 20 debris items in each of these categories to earn your badges:

1) Snack food wrappers and food packaging
2) Drink items (aluminum cans, plastic bottles, etc.)
3) Plastic Straws
4) Fast food containers and plastic utensils
5) Plastic Bags

You can find debris in many places! Pick up trash at the beach, the park, your school campus, your yard, and your neighborhood! Be sure to work with an adult to find your debris, and do not touch anything that looks dangerous or sharp.

3. Request your badge
Once you have collected your debris in one category, head back to our “How to Earn Your Badges” webpage and then click the badge you are requesting.

Fill out the form, answer a few questions, and upload a picture! You will receive your digital badge at the email you provided in a few days. In the meantime, don’t forget to work towards your other badges!

uncw.edu/marinequest/2TC.html
How to Stay Safe When Collecting Debris

Safety first!
Follow these easy safety guidelines to keep yourself safe during your clean up:

- Work with an adult: always make sure you have an adult nearby who can help you with your clean up!
- Be mindful of where you are at all times and stay with your adult.
- Check the weather and tides: do not go out for a cleanup in severe weather. If doing a beach cleanup, try to go at low tide.
- Do not touch any item that looks like it may be dangerous, sharp, or rusty! Check with your adult if you are unsure.
- Wear reusable gloves and closed-toed shoes: protect your hands and your feet from debris during clean ups by wearing protective, reusable gloves and appropriate footwear. If you do not have gloves, avoid touching sharp objects and be sure to wash your hands after collecting debris.
- Bring water, snacks, and sunscreen.

Stay aware of your surroundings and any potential hazards!
Turtle Trash Collectors Badges:

**Plastic Bags**
Sources: grocery stores, department stores, malls, restaurants, newspapers,

Alternatives: bring a reusable shopping bag with you when shopping, opt for paper bags

**Plastic Straws**
Sources: restaurants, fast-food joints, coffee shops, smoothie stores

Alternatives: Get a reusable metal, bamboo, or plastic straw that you can use over and over again! Or simply skip the straw and drink directly from the cup!

**Snack Food Wrappers & Food Packaging**
Sources: pre-packaged servings of chips, pretzels, or other snacks; plastic baggies from snacks and lunches packaged at home; granola/cereal bar wrappers

Alternatives: Try buying your food in bulk and use reusable containers to take your snacks on the go. Reusable containers come in many shapes and sizes and can be found at the grocery stores and online. You can also get reusable bags that are perfect for your sandwiches, fruits, and veggies.
Turtle Trash Collectors Badges:

**Drink Items**
Examples: drink pouches, aluminum cans, plastic water or soda bottles

Sources: grocery/convenience stores, lunch boxes, vending machines, coffee shops, smoothie stores

Alternatives: Try using a reusable water bottle that can be refilled for free at water fountains. Bring your own reusable cup when buying beverages on the go. Many places, including Starbucks and Dunkin’ Donuts, will even give you a discount for bringing your own cup!

**Fast Food Containers & Plastic Utensils**
Sources: fast food restaurants, ordering food “to-go,” school cafeteria

Alternatives: Try to bring your own utensils from home, dine in at restaurants instead of getting take-out, skip places that serve food in plastic or plastic foam and opt for paper or cardboard instead.

**2TC Hero**
Once you have earned all your other Turtle Trash Collector badges, you’re eligible for the 2TC Hero badge!
Upcycling Activities

A great way to reuse an item is to upcycle, or make something more valuable out of it! We have included a few ideas here that will be useful during your cleanups, but get creative and make your own!

**Upcycled Bag from a T-Shirt**

**Step 1:** Fold t-shirt in half, length wise. Mark and cut where you will cut the neckline and sleeves to create your bag opening and straps. Keep at least 3 inches for the straps if possible.

**Step 2:** Flip shirt inside out and lay flat. At the bottom of the shirt, cut 1 inch wide by 2 inch tall fringe.
Step 3: Tie the top and bottom fringes together to close bottom of bag. Once tied, you can also tie fringes adjacent to each other together to close any tiny holes.

Step 4: Flip bag right side out and enjoy your upcycled t-shirt bag!

Source: https://www.scatteredthoughtsofacraftymom.com/how-to-make-tote-bag-from-t-shirt-no-sewing/2/
**Mechanical Grabber**

**Materials:** Wire hanger, wire cutters, 3-foot long 1-inch wide PVC pipe, 3-foot long ¼-inch wide wooden dowel, duct tape, bottle cap.

**Step 1:** Use wire cutters to cut the bottom portion of the hanger in the middle. Straighten out the hooked part of the hanger and reshape the two sides to create the “hands” of the grabber.

**Step 2:** Tape the handle portion of the hanger to the end of your dowel.
Step 3: Place the dowel and hanger into the PVC pipe so the “hands” poke out. Attach the bottle cap to the opposite end to help hold it in place. You can also add corks or rubber bands to your “hands” if you want to help you grab more efficiently!

Step 4: Use your grabber to pick up marine debris during your next cleanup!


For more upcycling activities, visit our Traveling Through Trash upcycling resource here: https://uncw.edu/marinequest/grantsprojects/irefuz.html
My Badges

(Name)

Print your badges and paste them on the circles here to keep track of your accomplishments!
Resources

NOAA Marine Debris Program website: https://marinedebris.noaa.gov
Activities and Curricula: https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/activities-and-curricula
Fact Sheets: https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/fact-sheets
Posters and Brochures: https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/posters-and-brochures
NOAA Marine Debris Program Clearing House: https://clearinghouse.marinedebris.noaa.gov
NOAA Marine Debris Program Blog: https://blog.marinedebris.noaa.gov
NOAA Marine Debris Program Videos: https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/multimedia/videos
TRASH TALK special feature from NOAA Ocean Today: https://oceantoday.noaa.gov/trashtalk_specialfeature/welcome.html
TRASH TALK Webinar for Educators from NOAA Ocean Today: https://oceantoday.noaa.gov/trashtalk_webinar/welcome.html
Trash Free Seas ® Website: https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/
Educator Resources: https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/outreach-education/
“Skip the Straw” Campaign - Ocean Conservancy: https://oceanconservancy.org/trash-free-seas/outreach-education/skip-the-straw/
Plastic Ocean Project Website: http://www.plasticoceanproject.org

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