

Clean Ocean Access



Marine debris is a time-sensitive issue impacting ocean health and is a solvable problem that starts with smart choices on land.

Thousands of RI Volunteers Take Action

by Wendy Faxon

Clean Ocean Access (COA) in Middletown, RI, is dedicated to eliminating marine debris, improving coastal water quality and preserving public access to the shoreline, so that future generations can enjoy ocean activities, such as swimming, fishing and kayaking. It has three core programs which are the basis for its name. Each program goal is clear, simple in design, and has a multi-dimensional approach to achieve its vision. With the help of citizen scientist volunteers and community partners, the organization tackles ocean pollution at its root—on land.

Composting

One major project, Healthy Soils, Healthy Seas RI (HSHSRI), brings together composting efforts in partnership with existing food-waste-diversion groups: The Compost Plant, Rhodeside Revival and the Aquidneck Community Table. The three partners serve as the boots-on-the-ground team that will manage all commercial and residential composting collection and processing with an initial focus on Aquidneck Island. Approximately 32 percent of the total municipal disposal is residential food waste. A head of lettuce takes 25 years to decompose in a landfill. Food waste is the waste category with the largest potential for increased diversion to composting and/or aerobic or anaerobic digesters.

Citizens participating in the HSH-SRI project collect data on the amount of material leaving their homes —compost, recyclables and landfill trash. The project encourages people to think critically about their waste footprints and empowers them to reevaluate the need for low-and-no value materials, such as single use plastics (unrecyclable food wrappers, chip bags, styrofoam trays), that enter the landfill, or worse, end up polluting the ocean.

Eliminating Marine Debris

The CLEAN program exists to educate, inspire and empower the community to solve the problem of marine debris through activities that eliminate marine debris from the shoreline, improve habitat and promote environmental stewardship. COA has been coordinating two coastal cleanup events per month, from September through April,



along the entire shoreline of Aquidneck Island. It also organizes coastal cleanup events for neighboring Jamestown and Little Compton. In addition, COA provides all materials for small groups to do flexible schedule cleanups on a regular basis.

Data collection plays a major role in advancing community-based, data-driven advocacy efforts. COA's tally sheet is modeled after one created by the Ocean Conservancy. It is divided into six categories. As an example, one category is Smoking-Related Activities. In a 2013-2018 period, COA reports the collection of 1,301

3RD ANNUAL World Ocean's Day Fundraiser

Clean Ocean Access (COA) will host the 3rd Annual World Oceans Day fundraiser from 6 to 9 p.m., June 6, at Easton's Beach, in Newport. The event will include live music, catered dinner and drinks sponsored by Whole Foods Market and Flat Waves Food Shack, as well as a silent auction and the presentation of the third "CLEAN OCEAN ACCESS MISSION2.OCEAN AWARD" to an outstanding COA volunteer.

Prior to the event, there will be a cleanup at Easton's (First) Beach from 4 to 5:30 p.m. The cleanup and fundraiser are both in celebration of the international World Oceans Day event and help bring awareness to COA's goals of eliminating marine debris, improving coastal water quality and protecting and preserving shoreline access.

Cost: \$60 for fundraiser; cleanup is free. Location: 175 Memorial Blvd, Newport. For more information, visit CleanOceanAccess.org.

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lighters, 3,623 cigar tips, 3,676 pieces of tobacco packaging and 80,200 cigarette butts and filters (Clean Ocean Access 2018 Clean Report). Ninety-five percent of cigarette filters are made of tightly packed cellulose acetate (plastic) fibers, thinner than sewing thread. This makes up some of the plastic debris ingested by fish.

As a result of the data collected by thousands of volunteers, Clean Ocean Access successfully advocated for an island-wide ordinance prohibiting smoking at public beaches, parks, recreation areas and the famed Cliff Walk. COA's massive amounts of data are used to

influence change, and the success of these efforts is made possible by the 12,665 local citizen science volunteers that have invested more than 22,000 hours to address the global problem of marine debris.

In 2016, COA launched the Southeast New England Marina Trash Skimmer program and has since successfully operated four trash skimmers that have removed 20,615 pounds of comingled debris and more than 27,000 individual items of debris from the Aquidneck Island shoreline over the course of 166 site visits. On April 19, COA launched the Providence River Marina Trash Skimmer with an event at the Hot Club, making Providence the first state capital in the nation to streamline the elimination of marine debris. COA is advancing and expanding the awareness, scalability and effectiveness of this technology with grants for three more Trash Skimmers; the program will be expanding to New Bedford, Massachusetts.



Improving Coastal Water Quality

The OCEAN program is about monitoring water quality, especially during September through May, when many people use

the ocean, but state monitoring is not performed. Rooftops, driveways, roads, expansive lawns, residential and commercial activities can lead to storm water runoff or combined sewage overflows that wreak havoc on coastal water quality. Citizen scientists can get involved with activities such as water sampling. COA collects 20 samples per week, identifies problems and provides

timely remediation.

Preserving Shoreline Access

Limited access to the shoreline is how the organization started in 2006 and is its most important issue. The ACCESS program started to remove barriers and evolved into an effort that includes topics such as erosion, sea-level rise, invasive species and long-term shoreline planning. Rhode Island has roughly 400 miles of coastline and 227 "rights of way," which are listed on the RI Coastal Resource Management Council (CRMC) website (crmc.ri.gov/publicaccess.html). Citizens can help preserve shoreline access by reporting on their use and on barriers that arise at local access points.

Learn more about all these programs, projects and events at CleanOceanAccess.org. Donate, volunteer and advocate to help preserve the state's ocean, bay and coastal environments.



World Oceans Day is June 8

Rhode Islanders can plan to celebrate World Oceans Day by organizing local community shoreline clean-ups that include collecting data on marine debris. COA hosted its first beach cleanup in September 2006, as part of the International Coastal Cleanup (ICC). Since then, the organization's achievements have helped beautify the coastlines, improve local habitat and build social capital—friendships, positive energy and environmentally responsible behavior. In addition to beach cleanup activism, COA seeks volunteers to help with photography, table events, attend city council meetings and participate in fundraising events like Paddle for Access and Swim to Skim in August.

Clean Ocean Access Executive Director, Dave McLaughlin, reports, "Marine debris is a time-sensitive issue impacting ocean health and is a solvable problem that starts with smart choices on land. Combining four marina trash skimmers with our existing year-round shoreline cleanup efforts, and education and outreach efforts, it positions us to successfully inspire, educate and empower the community to make better choices on land. Whether it is eliminating single-use material from our daily lives, composting our food scraps, recycling right, or increasing our level of responsibility to ensure no trash ends up as litter—each one of us in the Ocean State can take action today so that we become the role model for environmental stewardship." He adds, "Think about your choices, and never expect change if you don't do it yourself. Start with yourself; start today."