



San Diego County Beach Cleanup Data Report 2018

San Diego Coastkeeper and the Surfrider Foundation San Diego County Chapter partner each year to conduct a series of public beach cleanups, averaging four per month, in order to address the issue of trash on our beaches and in our oceans.. In addition to these community cleanups, both organizations also host special cleanup events and empower individual volunteers to host their own. These events combined have led to the removal of over 102,708 pounds of trash from our beaches, canyons and waterways since 2007.

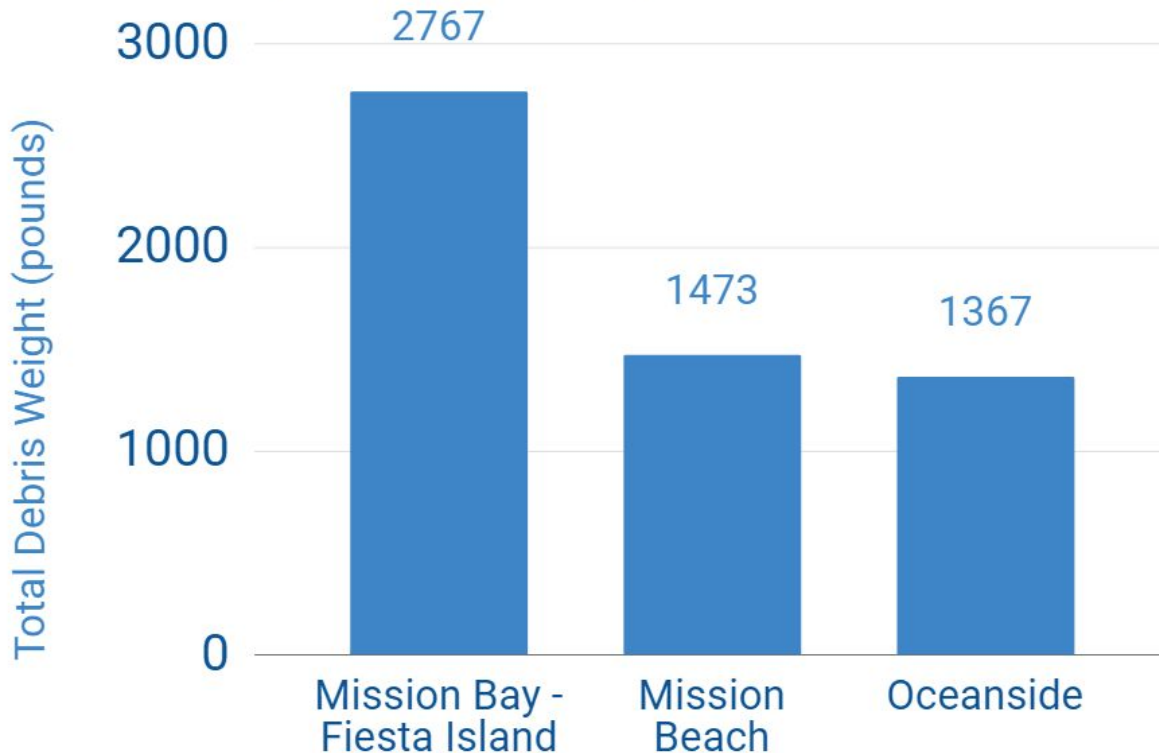
The program continued to gain momentum in 2018, seeing a significant increase in both volunteers and items collected. This year, 8,864 volunteers removed 164,868 items of trash from our coastline, with a total weight of 11,530 pounds. In 2017, 8,190 volunteers removed 118,018 items of trash, with a total weight of 9,352 pounds. While we applaud the increases in pounds per volunteer effort this year (from 1.37 lbs per volunteer to 1.6 lbs per volunteer in 2018), we are troubled by the amount of debris being collected overall.

In 2018, the area with the most trash removed per volunteer was Fiesta Island in Mission Bay, with 6.54 pounds of debris collected per cleanup participant. Mission Bay's beaches often account for the highest rates of trash removed per volunteer. This is likely related to the high amount of human use that Mission Bay receives all year, as the area is commonly used by residents and tourists alike for events, gatherings, and recreation. Anecdotally, Fiesta Island also seems more prone to illegal dumping than other beaches. Volunteers did an outstanding job removing debris from Fiesta Island this year, making it the area with the highest total weight of debris removed - 2,767.3 pounds in 2018 - across the cleanups we held there.

Most Trash per Volunteer Effort

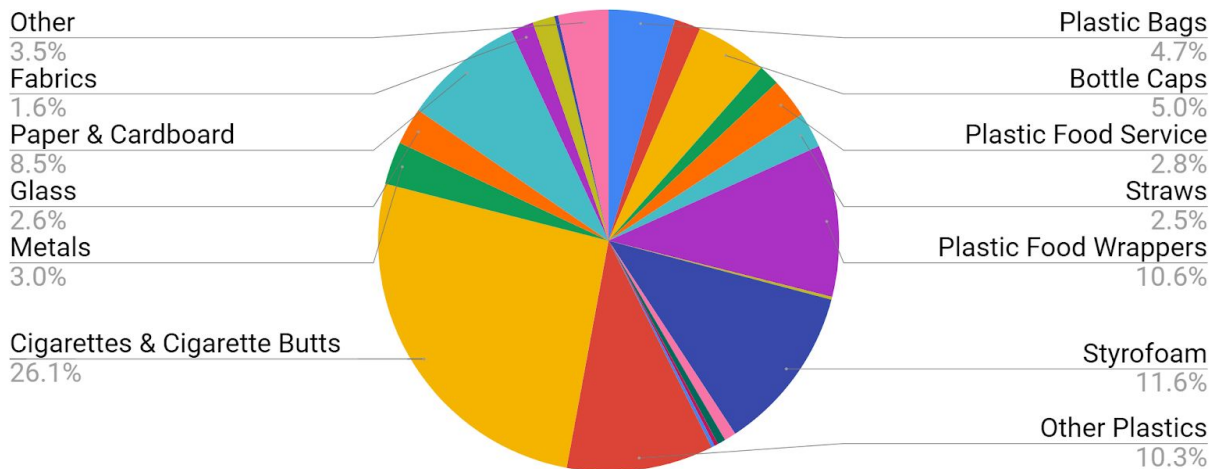
Year	Beach or Region	Pounds per Vol
2009	Ocean Beach-Sunset Cliffs	6.06
2010	Pacific Beach - Tourmaline	4.97
2011	Ocean Beach Pier	3.57
2012	Mission Beach	3.8
2013	Cardiff State Beach	4.06
2014	Mission Bay - Fiesta Island	3.43
2015	Mission Bay - Fiesta Island	4.68
2016	Ocean Beach - Sunset Cliffs	5.67
2017	Mission Bay	3.57
2018	Mission Bay - Fiesta Island	6.54

Total Weight of Debris - Top Three Areas in 2018



52.8% of debris collected was plastic.

The percent of plastic found in the total items collected decreased almost 2 percent this year. This count, however, does not include cigarette butts, which contain a plastic foam filter. When cigarette butts are included among the plastic items, that percentage jumps to 78.9 percent. Plastics are particularly damaging to the marine environment, as they do not biodegrade, and are easily mistaken as food and ingested by wildlife. Many of the plastics collected were pieces less than one inch in diameter, and much of it was expanded polystyrene foam, or Styrofoam®. With styrofoam bans in Encinitas, Solana Beach, Imperial Beach and most recently the City of San Diego, we are hopeful that this number will decrease in 2019.



46,850 more items were collected in 2018 than 2017.

2018 saw a large increase in the total number of items removed, which is partly due to the increase in volunteers collecting trash compared to last year. Item counts include trash of many sizes, from the tiniest shards of plastic food wrappers, to the largest discarded furniture and appliances, and everything in between. The amount of trash on our beaches continues to be staggering, and there is still plenty of work left to be done.

Cigarette butts topped the list *again* in 2018.

Cigarette butts remain the most prevalent type of debris found at our beach cleanups. In 2017, volunteers removed 32,247 cigarette butts from our beaches. This year, that number increased to 43,058, reversing last year’s trend. Despite laws banning smoking at every city-managed beach in the county, cigarette butts are still the most commonly found item at beach cleanups. They are a major concern for the health of San Diego County beaches. Butts are non-biodegradable and leach toxins, toxic chemicals and carcinogens into the water, poisoning marine life and beachgoers alike. They also move with ease through city stormwater systems, entering roadside storm drains and traveling underground through outfalls along the coast. Because stormwater is untreated, littered butts from all over the county find their way to the beach eventually.

Intact plastic bags continue to be a problem.

The total number of fully intact plastic bags found was 7,732, representing 5 percent of total items removed. This reverses the trend of gradual decreases in bag totals in recent years- more than doubling the percentage of intact bags found last year in 2017.

Although the state bag ban that was adopted in 2016 has encouraged people to use reusable bags, our data shows that single use plastic bags continue to plague our

beaches and canyons.

Due to their disproportionately dangerous impacts on marine wildlife, limiting plastic bags should continue to be encouraged and enacted. We should also note that plastic bags easily break down into smaller pieces, many of which are counted as “other plastics” by cleanup volunteers. We hope that continued outreach will result in plastic bags becoming a rarity not only on our beaches, but in our canyons, communities, and in our ocean as well.

Top 3 items of concern: Cigarette Butts (43,058)
Plastic Foam (19,223)
Plastic Food Wrappers (17,570)

The usual unusuals

In addition to collecting data on common beach debris such as cigarette butts, plastic foam, and plastic food wrappers, volunteers are also asked to note any “unusual items” they find during the course of the cleanup. Over the years we have noticed some “unusual” items documented so frequently that they have become known as our “usual unusuals.” For instance, glow sticks are so common that this year we included them as an item on the data sheet (934 were picked up in 2018). They are frequently used in night fishing as a fish aggregation device, and are being discarded or littered after use. Our top three unusual items in 2018 were bandaids, condoms and lighters.

A few other bizarre finds from 2018 - as reported by our cleanup volunteers - include a bobble head, fake eyeball, large inflatable pink flamingo, half a life preserver and a toy dinosaur...just to name a few.

