

Frequently asked questions

What is *Beachwatch*?

Beachwatch began in 1993, and is a national [Marine Conservation Society \(MCS\)](#) initiative to involve local communities in a practical projects to clean an survey beaches all around the UK coast. They survey is essential as it allows MCS to gather information on the main sources and types of beach litter, which MCS can then use to try to reduce litter at source. As a result of the success of *Beachwatch*, *Adopt-a-Beach* then started in 1999 with a grant from the National Lottery and is now sponsored by the [Crown Estate](#)

What is the difference between *Adopt-a-Beach* and *Beachwatch*?

Beachwatch is the flagship event of the *Adopt-a-Beach* project and takes place on the third weekend of September every year as part of the US Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup. *Adopt-a-Beach* surveys are carried out more regularly (quarterly) and the results are used at a local level help target sources, while the *Beachwatch* results are compiled for the *Beachwatch* report every spring and are used by MCS at a national level to raise awareness and influence Government policy and promote individual and industry responsibility with respect to waste.

Who can take part in *Beachwatch* and *Adopt-a-Beach*?

Anyone can! There are two options: An [organiser](#) can choose their favourite local beach to adopt and then organise the survey and find volunteers to help them, or [volunteers](#) can just turn up on the survey day at an adopted beach and help collect and record the litter found.

How frequently are *Adopt-a-Beach* surveys carried out?

The surveys are carried out seasonally - Spring, Summer, Autumn (*Beachwatch*) and Winter.

Which parts of the beach are surveyed?

We ask volunteers to collect and record each item of beach litter on a minimum 100 metre stretch of the beach, between the current high water strandline and the top of the useable beach. Depending on number of volunteers, the survey generally takes between 1-2 hours.

What happens to the survey data?

Beachwatch data is analyse by MCS and a summary report is sent to each

beach organiser so they can highlight the main sources of the litter in their area and approach relevant businesses or agencies to identify solutions. At a national level, MCS uses the results from the *Beachwatch* litter surveys to publish a *Beachwatch* Report every spring; influence Government policy and industry practices, and raise awareness of the problems caused by beach litter.

What are the main impacts of beach litter?

Litter is more than just an eyesore, it is potentially harmful to humans and wildlife. 177 different species of marine animal are known to mistake litter for food, which can block their digestive system, and items such as lost fishing nets and plastic bags can cause entanglement of wildlife. Beach litter costs local authorities in the UK an estimate £14.5 million annually to clean up.

What is the worst type of beach litter?

Plastics account for over 50% of the total beach litter found during surveys every year. Plastic does not break down easily and therefore accumulates in the marine environment, perhaps remaining on beaches and at sea for many decades.

What are the main sources of litter found?

- **Recreational & tourism** related litter includes items such as crisp packets and drink cans - nationally the most abundant type of litter on our beaches (38% in *Beachwatch* 2004).
- **Fishing debris** is waste from the recreational and commercial fishing industry. Sometimes nets, fish boxes etc. can be lost by accident, but they may also be discarded deliberately as it is difficult to enforce litter laws at sea (14% in *Beachwatch* 2004).
- **Sewage related debris (SRD)** includes sanitary towels, cotton bud sticks, tampons and tampon applicators, condoms and nappies that have been flushed down the toilet. As well as being unsightly, this type of litter can pose a potential health risk to people, especially children who don't know what they might be touching (9% in *Beachwatch* 2004).
- **Shipping waste** includes discarded litter from the shipping industry, as well as recreational boats and passenger ferries. Although illegal under

international law, in some cases rubbish is disposed of over the side at sea - some of which is difficult to distinguish from beach visitor litter (2.0% in Beachwatch 2004).

10) What can be done?

Adopt-a-Beach and *Beachwatch* data can be used to target local sources of beach litter, but national measures must also be taken to help prevent the problem. The majority of litter found on most of our beaches is left by beach users and steps must be taken by beach owners and managers to ensure there are signs on the beach to encourage sensible disposal of litter and that adequate litter bins are provided. Public and media support of the *Bag It and Bin It* campaign encourages the public not to flush sanitary waste down the toilet and could therefore help reduce this source. Mandatory fees for Port waste reception facilities, for shipping AND fishing vessels would help reduce shipping and fishing litter, whilst a reduction in the amount of plastics used in packaging would have a big impact on litter everywhere. Finally, stricter enforcement of the littering laws is needed in the UK, with larger fines, supporting the 'Polluter Pays' principle. Extra information is available on the *Adopt-a-Beach* website www.adoptabeach.org.uk

There are a few simple things everyone can do to reduce beach litter:

- Put litter in the bin, never drop litter
- Recycle as much rubbish as possible
- Avoid purchasing over packaged goods
- If your council does not provide facilities for plastic recycling, write to them asking why
- Reuse plastic bags, better still buy a canvas shopping bag, or a bag for life
- Bag It an Bin It! NEVER flush items such as cotton bud sticks and sanitary waste down the toilet
- Take part in Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach – help make a difference to your local coastal environment

- Join MCS and help protect our coasts, seas and wildlife for all to enjoy – www.mcsuk.org