Let's Make Trash Extinct!

Below are 29 trash "species" that are a problem for our coast and shorelines. Learn why we want them to go extinct, and how you can make it happen!

Learn more about The Problem with Marine Debris.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Since 1989, cigarette butts are the top item collected during California Coastal Cleanup Day, accounting for 36% of every debris item ever picked up.

95% of cigarette filters are made of plastic (cellulose acetate). Ingestion of plastic cigarette filters is a threat to wildlife and children, who may mistake butts and other small plastic pieces for food. Eating them could cause an animal to choke or starve to death because the plastic isn't digested. Toxic chemicals leach out of cigarette butts into our waterways—in a study done recently at San Diego State University, the chemicals from just one filtered cigarette butt had the ability to kill half the fish living in a 1-liter container of water. Improperly discarded cigarette butts can cause fires that destroy homes, habitat, and cost a lot of money.

How Can You Help?

Don't smoke! But If you do smoke, do not litter. Extinguish the cigarette before disposing it in a trash can. Consider using a portable fire resistant ashtray. Educate smokers and the community about the impact of cigarette butts on the environment and encourage them not to litter.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Improperly discarded fishing gear can produce widespread effects. Nets and fishing line can obstruct propellers and be costly to repair and potentially hazardous to the safety and livelihood of fishermen and recreational boaters. Abandoned or lost fishing gear can entangle animals, limiting their ability to move or eat and eventually killing them. Countless animals representing over 200 different species have been killed by abandoned or lost fishing gear.

How Can You Help?

Take the time to untangle and collect your used fishing line. Then put it in the trash. Or better yet—put it in a fishing line recycling container, now found at marinas and launch ramps throughout California.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Expanded polystyrene foam (commonly known by the brand name "styrofoam") is one of the most difficult materials to manage. Its lightweight characteristics and its tendency to break apart into ever smaller pieces easily means that each foamed packing peanut often results in tens, hundreds, or even thousands of small, buoyant, easily airborne bits of litter that are almost impossible to clean up.

How Can You Help?

Crumpled up paper works about as well to protect whatever you are trying to ship, and is a lot more recyclable. But if you must use foamed packaging peanuts, collect them in a bag and bring them to your local shipping retailer for reuse.
Why Should it go Extinct?

More than 125,000 cigarette lighters have been collected during Coastal Cleanup Day since 1989. Buoyant and colorful, these items are often mistaken for food by seabirds and then fed to their young. They are a very common item found in the stomachs of Laysan Albatross chick carcasses on Midway Atoll, located in the remote island chain halfway between Japan and Hawaii.

How Can You Help?

When your lighter runs out of lighter fluid, throw it away properly! Or invest in a refillable (and classier!) lighter.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Like almost all single-use disposable plastics, it is used for only seconds but lasts forever. Conventional, petroleum-based plastic never truly biodegrades—it simply breaks apart into ever smaller pieces, becoming more difficult to manage in our environment.

How Can You Help?

If there's a reusable option available (such as a washable metal spoon), choose it! If you're filling up your own cup, add the milk and/or sugar first and swirl it around in a bit of the hot coffee before adding the rest. If you're ordering from a coffee bar, you can usually request that they add your milk or sugar when they make your drink.
Why Should it go Extinct?

These sharp items can be a serious hazard when littered, especially at the beach. We all deserve to walk barefoot on the beach without worrying about cutting ourselves on litter. Sadly, litter items like this make that next to impossible.

How Can You Help?

Dispose of these items properly—in the recycling bin! Cans and their lids are made of valuable resources—mostly either aluminum or steel—that can be recycled back into other cans or made into other useful, durable items. Help close the recycling loop!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Expanded polystyrene foam (commonly known by the brand name "styrofoam") is dangerous to both the environment and humans. Styrofoam cups break apart easily, but never completely break down. The foam beads persist in the environment for hundreds of years to come. Styrofoam cups are made from a type of plastic called polystyrene. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified styrene as a "possible carcinogen." When a styrofoam cup is heated, this toxic chemical leaches out into our drink.

How Can You Help?

Refuse this item! You can choose not to purchase food that comes in foam. Patronize restaurants that use more sustainable materials. When at a restaurant that has durable dishes for eat-in customers, why not take a load off and eat there? For take-out, how about bringing your own reusable mug?
Why Should it go Extinct?

Dog poop can contain *E. coli* bacteria, tapeworm, and other parasites and viruses, contaminating water, or allowing diseases to spread. Studies have shown that the longer dog waste sits around, the more cultured some of these bacteria, parasites, or viruses can become.

How Can You Help?

You've already picked up after your dog. Now, just remember to throw it in a trash bin!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Plastic to-go containers are found littered on nearly every beach, as well as spilling out of overflowing trash cans. Many are hard to recycle. Paper options are available! Or better yet, bring your own glass or metal to-go container from home when you eat out.

How Can You Help?

Refuse this item! You can choose not to purchase food that comes in plastic. Patronize restaurants that use more sustainable materials. When at a restaurant that has durable dishes for eat-in customers, why not take a load off and eat there? For take-out, how about bringing your own containers to be filled? Visit Take Out Without for tips on avoiding take-out waste.
**Why Should it go Extinct?**

As handy as these may be around the house, when they escape into the environment, they can be as harmful as plastic grocery bags. They photo-degrade in the sun, breaking into ever smaller plastic particles that become increasingly difficult to clean up. Plastic bags are always among the top 5 items picked up on Coastal Cleanup Day.

**How Can You Help?**

These don't have to be single-use disposable items! These bags can be washed out and reused. But when you're really done with it, make sure it goes in the trash can. If you're at the beach and there are no trash cans with lids, pack that trash home where it can be disposed of safely away from the wind. You can also try one of the many reusable alternatives, including cloth bags and resealable containers.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Metal bottle caps are sharp and rust quickly, especially close to the marine environment. Those sharp teeth can cut the bare feet of unsuspecting beachgoers.

How Can You Help?

Just like the glass bottle it came from, metal bottle caps are easily recyclable. Make sure it's placed in the recycling bin after you open your bottle—and put the bottle there when you're done, too!
Why Should it go Extinct?

What goes up must come down, and that adage is true of balloons. They may look pretty floating off into the sky, but the harm they cause to animals is NOT worth it. Helium balloons can travel for miles over the open ocean, where they eventually descend. At that point, like other marine debris, balloons may be mistaken for food by animals, causing choking or a false sense of fullness from a stomach full of trash. Eating a balloon can seriously harm or kill animals.

How Can You Help?

If you get a balloon, keep a close hold on it. When you're done with it, carefully pop it and properly dispose of all the pieces. Before you take a balloon (such as from a store or at a carnival), take a moment to think about it as something that will be trash within a few hours or days at most. Do you want to make this trash?

Balloon releases are NOT cool. Discover another way to celebrate, such as singing a song or planting a tree or scattering native wildflower seeds.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Since we started Coastal Cleanup Day in 1985, volunteers have removed more than 479,000 of them from our coast and inland shorelines.

How Can You Help?

Recycle—make sure they end up in a recycling container—not on a street, sidewalk, park, or beach.
Why Should it go Extinct?

In 2016, volunteers collected 7,620 plastic utensils in three hours on Coastal Cleanup Day. A plastic fork may seem convenient for the 20 minutes it's used. But what about the rest of that fork's life? It started out as crude oil sucked out from the ground, was combined with chemicals and turned into a fork shape, was packaged and shipped until finally reaching a store near you. After its 20 minutes of usefulness, if not properly disposed of, the fork may end up in the environment where it will spend years breaking down, releasing toxins, and harming wildlife. Was that process really more convenient than bringing your own reusable fork?

How Can You Help?

Bring your own! There are lots of options for reusable, durable utensils, made from metals or a renewable resource like bamboo, that pack along easily. Some even come in their own holders so they're even more convenient. All it takes is a little advanced planning to pack a truly waste-free lunch!
**Why Should it go Extinct?**

Better question...why is it needed at all?

**How Can You Help?**

This is yet another piece of single-use disposable plastic whose value is limited, if it exists at all. Don’t use one. If your coffee shop offers one, kindly decline.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Setting off fireworks at the beach can be dangerous when they explode, but leaving behind firework debris can be hazardous as well, as the debris contains flammable and potentially combustible materials.

How Can You Help?

The beach is not a great place for fireworks in the first place; however, if you feel that you really must, be sure to clean up after yourselves! July 5th tends to be one of the dirtiest days on California's beaches across the state—do your part to help us gain independence from trash!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Since the Coastal Cleanup started, volunteers have removed over 35,000 tires; that's enough for 8,750 cars! Tires release toxins as they decompose, polluting the water, air and soil. Discarded tires can act as a fire source when heated in extreme weather. Fires fueled by tires contain toxic chemicals that pose human health consequences.

How Can You Help?

Always make sure that your used tires are disposed of properly—at the landfill or taken back by a certified shop. They also make great swings and can be recycled into shoe soles, wallets, or any number of useful items.
**Why Should it go Extinct?**

Expanded polystyrene foam (commonly known by the brand name "styrofoam") is one of the most difficult waste materials to manage. It's lightweight characteristics and its tendency to break apart into ever smaller pieces easily means that each styrofoam product often results in tens, hundreds, or even thousands of small, buoyant, easily airborne bits of litter that are almost impossible to clean up. And, just like styrofoam cups, these food containers are made from a possibly carcinogenic, toxic chemical, that can leach into food, especially if heated.

**How Can You Help?**

Refuse this item! You can choose not to purchase food that comes in foam. Patronize restaurants that use more sustainable materials. When at a restaurant that has durable dishes for eat-in customers, why not take a load off and eat there? For take-out, how about bringing your own containers to be filled? Visit Take Out Without for tips on avoiding take-out waste.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Since we started California Coastal Cleanup Day in 1985, volunteers have removed more than 527,000 of them from our coast and inland shorelines. They are a blight in our shared communities, and the plastic varieties of these nuisances can break down into ever smaller pieces without ever truly biodegrading, leaching toxic chemicals and causing increasing harm to our marine environment, including our food chain.

How Can You Help?

Reusable bottles are a great option for drinking water—pledge to start using a reusable water bottle or to use it more than you already are. And if you must drink from single-use disposable bottles and cans, make sure they end up in a recycling container—not on a street, sidewalk, park, or beach.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Candy wrappers, chip bags, ketchup packets and the like are the second most common item found on Coastal Cleanup Day each year, making up more than 10% of the items collected. They are lightweight, which allow them to blow easily into nearby bushes, trees, or waterbodies, becoming a blight on our environment.

How Can You Help?

Eat healthy and don't buy them! If you must, make sure they end up in a trash can with a secure lid.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Toxic chemicals can leach out of discarded cigars into our waterways, potentially harming wildlife. Improperly discarded cigars can cause fires destroying habitats for animals, homes and representing high economic costs.

How Can You Help?

Always dispose your cigars in the right spot—an ashtray or garbage can. But make sure it's fully extinguished before you do!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Last year, almost 19,000 straws were removed on Coastal Cleanup Day. Straws are the sixth most commonly found litter. Due to its durability, buoyancy, and ability to accumulate and concentrate toxins present in the ocean, plastic is especially harmful to marine life.

How Can You Help?

"Please, no straw! Thank you!" Repeat as necessary. Do you really need a straw? It's likely that you don't. That straw you used for one meal will be trash forever, so instead why not just skip it? Still feel like you need a straw? There are several companies now making sturdy, reusable glass and metal straws. Carry one with you and pull it out as a visual cue to your server that you REALLY don't need a straw! You can encourage your favorite restaurant to start purchasing paper straws (which biodegrade and can be composted) instead of plastic.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Stepping on chewed gum is just gross! Plus, chewing gum is made with a plasticizer, meaning it will never biodegrade.

How Can You Help?

If you must chew, throw it away when you're done!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Bottle caps are that aren’t leashed to their bottle are easy to lose. They’re often made out of a type of plastic called polypropylene, which floats in water and is therefore particularly attractive to animals like albatross that find their food near the surface of the ocean. During 2016’s Coastal Cleanup Day, volunteers removed 41,200 plastic bottle caps. Over 1,751,000 bottle caps and lids have been collected since Coastal Cleanup Day began, making them the third most common item.

How Can You Help?

That reusable water bottle will work for flavored beverages just as well as it does for water—just be sure to wash it out afterwards. If that's not an option, then be sure to dispose of that bottle cap properly—either in the recycling bin with the bottle, if your city recycles polypropylene (#5 plastic), or in the trash. You can also seek out bottle caps that do not detach from the bottle itself, such as the sport cap used by Crystal Geyser Natural Alpine Spring Water. This cap has no removable plastic bits, stays attached to the bottle, and can be recycled in most recycling facilities.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Aluminum cans—and all their parts!—are easily recycled. But those pull tabs can become a hazard on the beach, injuring children or anyone with bare feet who unwittingly steps on them.

How Can You Help?

Keep those tabs connected to the can, and recycle the whole thing when you're done. Aluminum is one of the most valuable and easily reusable packaging materials we have—keep that material out of the landfill and close the recycling loop!
Why Should it go Extinct?

Americans alone throw away over 100 billion bags a year. Plastic bags account for over 10 percent of the debris washed up on the U.S. coastline. Since 1989, plastic bags are among the top five items of debris most often found during the California Coastal Cleanup Day. Twelve billion single use plastic bags are consumed by Californians every year. Despite active efforts to expand recycling programs, the recycling rate of single use plastic bags remains around five percent. With the sheer number of plastic bags used in California, focusing on recycling alone is not a viable solution.

Plastic bags don't biodegrade, they photodegrade (by sunlight)—breaking down into smaller toxic pieces which eventually contaminate soils and waterways and enter the food web when animals accidentally ingest them. Wildlife becomes terminally entangled. Nearly 200 different species of sea life including whales, dolphins, seals and turtles die due to plastic bags, among other plastic debris items. In 2012, volunteers found 235 animals entangled in marine debris.

How Can You Help?

Bring a bag with you when you go to the store instead of accepting a paper or plastic bag. If don't have a bag with you, ask yourself if you really need a bag for the item purchased. Give reusable bags to your friends and family. They make great gifts! And spread the word by refusing to accept plastic bags from cashiers and store owners.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Six-pack rings can hamper the mobility of marine animals. Once entangled, animals have trouble eating, breathing or swimming, all of which can have fatal results. Plastics take hundreds of years to breakdown and may continue to trap and kill animals year after year. Since Coastal Cleanup Day began in 1985, volunteers have removed over 68,000 six-pack soda holders.

How Can You Help?

Aluminum soda cans are more readily recyclable than plastic bottles, but those 6-pack holders can be a problem. If you get one, be sure to cut it up before properly disposing of it. Look for cans sold in cardboard boxes instead. Think about other drink options, like your own teas, juices, or homemade flavored waters, and carrying them in a reusable bottle when travelling. Investigate home soda makers if you just have to have the bubbles.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Caps and lids always rank among the top 5 items picked up every Coastal Cleanup Day. Like all plastic, they will never truly "go away." Instead, they will contribute their broken apart plastic pieces to our environment, with many of them eventually making their way out to the garbage patches located within each of the ocean's five gyres.

Most coffee cup lids are made from #6 plastic—polystyrene (in its rigid variety, it also comes in a foamed type). There is significant evidence that shows that this plastic can leach toxins into food and drink, especially if the food or drink is hot.

How Can You Help?

Bring your reusable coffee mug to the cafe so that you don't need either the lid OR the cup. If you forgot your mug, ask yourself whether you really need that lid.
Why Should it go Extinct?

Glass bottles are a great choice in that glass is readily recyclable. However, glass on our shorelines harms people and wildlife when it breaks into sharp pieces.

How Can You Help?

The waste-free beverage strategy is to bring it from home, in a reusable bottle. If you purchase an individual drink in a glass bottle, always pack it out! Can you use this bottle again? (To hold a homemade drink, to store homemade salad dressing, to display a small bouquet of wildflowers? Click here for some great reuse DIY ideas.) If reuse is not an option, find the nearest recycling bin and properly dispose of this bottle. Don't be the reason someone has a bad day at the beach!