



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

April 4, 2024

Contacts:

Kira Cruz, Debris Free Sea Coordinator, beachsweeps@cleanoceanaction.org, 732-872-0111

Kiana Miranda, Public Relations & Communications Coordinator,

communications@cleanoceanaction.org, 732-872-0111

Cindy Zipf, Executive Director, zipf@CleanOceanAction.org, 732-872-0111

COA's 2023 Beach Sweeps Report Reveals the "Dirty Dozen" and "Roster of the Ridiculous" – The Usual Unusual Plus, Celebrate Earth Month at Beach Sweeps Saturday, April 13 (also attached.)

Long Branch, NJ – Where can you find a loveseat couch, a Christmas wreath, and an area rug? Apparently, at a local shore near you! Clean Ocean Action (COA) Beach Sweeps volunteers found these and so much more among 170,711 items on the beaches of New Jersey, according to its 2023 Beach Sweeps Report, which was released on Thursday, April 4. The report's premiere occurs each Spring to highlight the data collected in the previous year's beach cleanup event and to rally volunteers to attend the upcoming Spring Beach Sweeps on Saturday, April 13.

"While Mother Nature was not exactly on COA's side for the Beach Sweeps in 2023, I am still so amazed by the 3,664 volunteers who persevered in both the Spring and Fall Sweeps. After analyzing the data from 2023, it was powerful to see the similarities of debris removed per volunteer, even with lower numbers than in previous Sweeps years. It was also exciting to see how volunteers are finding less plastic overall—specifically with the items under the "Get Past Plastic" law. COA's data continues to play a crucial role in monitoring the various trends in specific types of debris found in NJ. Who knows what new trends we will start to see in 2024," said **Kira Cruz, Debris Free Sea Coordinator, Clean Ocean Action.**

The 2023 Beach Sweeps Report documents the items collected by 3,664 volunteers at 75 locations in just 6 hours during the 2023 Spring and Fall Beach Sweeps. The report includes data highlights and trends (pg. 4), the twelve most commonly collected items ("The Dirty Dozen", pg. 7), the most outrageous finds ("The Roster of the Ridiculous", pg. 5), as well as the Beach Sweeps data importance and in action (pg. 3).



Buckets and smiles as the Verona High School marine bio club gathers at Sandy Hook for the Fall 2023 Beach Sweeps

COA’s Beach Sweeps, held every April and October, is New Jersey’s largest, longest-running volunteer-driven, citizen science and environmental event. The site locations are from Montclair to Cape May with additional sites along the Delaware River. Over the years of Beach Sweeps, 169,565 volunteers have contributed 982,284 volunteer hours to remove and record debris from NJ’s beaches and waterways.

“The Beach Sweeps continue to provide an important and fun way for folks to give back to the ocean which brings so much joy, while also providing valuable evidence for advancing policies and actions to reduce the sources of this ugly and harmful litter,” **said Cindy Zipf, Executive Director, Clean Ocean Action.**

DATA MEANS ACTION

Collecting data is key to the Beach Sweeps program. The essential task can be tedious and time consuming, so it is a testament of true-blue ocean devotion by volunteers. Importantly, the data collected by Beach Sweeps volunteers provides hard evidence about the scope and magnitude of the marine debris problem, which people can use to convince elected officials to pass and enforce laws and policies to reduce the sources.

“I have presented data from the previous Beach Sweeps Report in multiple meetings with government officials, and it’s always helpful to have the document on hand because policymakers are interested in the data and want to know more. I am excited to have updated figures to share. This data is incredibly helpful for getting a sense of what the most problematic items are and how effective new laws have been. I’m so thankful to the volunteers who collected the data and COA staff who analyzed it.” **said Erika Bosack, Policy Attorney, Clean Ocean Action.**

The data is compiled into annual reports that have been used for over two decades as evidence of the need for strong policies and behavior changes to reduce litter and wasteful practices. Most notably, the Beach Sweeps data was used as evidence to support passage of the “Get Past

Plastic” law (P.L. 202, c.117), which went fully effective on May 4, 2022. The law bans all plastic bags from stores, paper bags from large stores, foam plastic (e.g., Styrofoam) food containers, and limits plastic straws upon request. In the first 5 months of the law coming into effect, the New Jersey Food Council estimated that 3.44 billion plastic bags and 68 million paper bags were eliminated from the waste stream. By May 2023, these numbers increased to an estimated 5.5 billion single-use plastic bags and 110 million paper bags. Beach Sweeps data was also used to support passage of the NJ Recycled Content law which incentivizes recycling by creating a market for recycled materials, including plastic. The law went into effect in January 2024.

Highlights of the Results



MAST Students huddle and prep breakfast snacks with 2023 statewide sponsor Wakefern Food Corp/ShopRite’s Corporate Social Responsibility Program Administrator, Steven Hildner

With nearly 100 specific items tallied, each Beach Sweeps provides a snapshot of what is found on New Jersey’s beaches. Here are some data highlights from the 2023 Beach Sweeps:

- 3,664 volunteers collected a total of 170,711 items.
- 79.16% of debris collected was plastic, including foam.
- Plastic Bottle Caps/Lids dominated the 2023 “Dirty Dozen” —the top 12 items collected —ranking #1 with 23,788 pieces and making-up 12.94% of the total debris collected for the year.
- Metal Beverage Cans made the "Dirty Dozen” list for the first time since 2008, totaling 4,106 pieces collected. In 2022, metal cans were #18.

- The “Roster of the Ridiculous” lists hundreds of items, including a small refrigerator, a 1960’s manufactured dinosaur toy, and a pregnancy test.

Since 1985, 169,675 Beach Sweeps volunteers have clocked in 982,614 hours (about 112 years) to remove 8,491,233 pieces of trash from beaches and parks across New Jersey!

Ocean Wavemakers

The last 39 years of success of the Beach Sweeps is possible thanks to the dedication and support of all the enthusiastic volunteers—from the small to the tall—committed to giving back to the ocean which gives them so much. Together, we can all make a difference for a cleaner ocean to be enjoyed by generations to come simply by picking up litter whenever and wherever we see it!



Beach Captain Leah and Sweeps volunteers at Island Beach State Park

COA’s devoted volunteer Beach Captains help well before the Beach Sweeps event, from assisting in engaging their communities to directing the masses of volunteers at each site. These Captains lead the cleanup effort and are an indispensable part to which Clean Ocean Action owes the overall success of the program. Thanks to the commitment of the Beach Captain volunteers, the program continues to grow its impact each year, expanding to more beaches, inspiring, and educating new volunteers, and removing continuously greater amounts of debris from the marine environment.

Waves of Thanks to Our Beach Sweeps Sponsors

Clean Ocean Action has organized grassroots volunteer Beach Sweeps across the state since 1985. These dedicated organizations have provided vital funding so that COA can execute and expand the Sweeps. Clean Ocean Action is grateful for the support of the sponsors and is inspired by all that they do to support our communities. Special thanks to our dedicated statewide sponsors: Bank of America, Hackensack Meridian Health, Wakefern Food Corporation/ShopRite, and Vantage Apparel.

“COA’s impact is undeniable, from visibly cleaner coastlines right here at my local beach in Sandy Hook, to healthier marine life and safer public swimming areas,” **said Alberto Garofalo, President, Bank of America New Jersey.** *“Our team is ready to roll up our sleeves alongside other volunteers and help make this year’s Sweeps another success.”*

“At Vantage Apparel, we understand the importance of environmental responsibility, and we are committed to making a positive difference,” **said Rob Watson, Chief Executive Officer of Vantage Apparel.** *“Our contribution to Clean Ocean Action is a testament to our dedication to sustainable business practices and the preservation of our planet for future generations.”*

Thank you to our true-blue countywide sponsors: Kearny Bank Foundation, Bayshore Recycling, and Target.



2023 countywide sponsor Hackensack Meridian Health volunteers at Spring Lake site for the Fall 2023 Beach Sweeps

Call to Action: Volunteers Needed on April 13

Clean Ocean Action is calling for volunteers to flock to beaches on Saturday, April 13, 2024, from 9am-12:30pm, to give the beaches a good clean sweep before the summer, just as many marine species return to the shore. Volunteers can sign-up to sweep at a record high 80+ locations along the coast, found on our Beach Sweeps [locations page](#).

To help COA reduce the use of plastic trash bags, volunteers are asked to bring their own repurposed bucket, bag, or other receptacle for trash collection; volunteers should also wear gloves and closed-toe, hard-soled shoes. Interested volunteers are encouraged to pre-register [here](#) or at CleanOceanAction.org.

###

Clean Ocean Action is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to improve the degraded water quality of the marine waters off the New Jersey/New York coast. Clean Ocean Action will identify the sources of pollution and mount an attack on each by using research, public education and citizen action to enact and enforce measures which will clean up and protect the Atlantic Ocean.