

Marine Debris—it's a consistent problem for humans and marine life by Karen Bryan

Marine debris is manmade litter that ends up in the ocean. Whether it was thrown off boats, left on the beach by a human, blown by the wind, or carried to the ocean by the stormwater system, it's a big problem. The vast majority of marine debris is plastic that can be harmful to marine life. For example, sea turtles mistake plastic bags for jellyfish, ingest the bag, and suffer when the bag becomes entangled in their intestines. Plastics decompose very slowly and breakdown into smaller and smaller pieces called microplastics. Seabirds mistake small floating plastic items as prey and feed it to their young, sometimes causing their chicks to die from malnutrition. As plastic breaks down, harmful chemicals such as bisphenol A (BPA) are released into the atmosphere. Studies have shown that fish exposed to BPA produce fewer healthy offspring. Discarded fishing lines and nets entangle marine mammals, birds, and turtles such as the one above found at Ft. Hase Beach last summer. Many governments have passed laws against ocean dumping to try to reduce marine debris, but there is so much debris in the ocean it will be difficult to remove.

As most MCBH residents know, we are not immune to marine debris. However, we are doing whatever it takes to keep our beaches clean. The Environmental Division hosts regular beach clean-ups, biannual Base-wide clean-ups, and receives support from numerous residents and groups such as the Stroller Warriors and Mokapu Elementary School to show pride in our community by keeping MCBH clean. There are a few things we can do to prevent marine debris in our immediate area. One, make sure you bag your trash before you put it in your bin. If not, the wind will blow lighter items such as plastic bags away as the garbage truck empties your bin. Two, pick up trash in your neighborhood so it doesn't get washed down the stormwater drain to the ocean. And, when you go to the beach, pack out your trash. Trash left behind in containers may be scattered by birds, mongoose, or other hungry critters and blown into the water before Facilities has a chance to empty the bins.

Activity: While practicing social distancing, collect debris from the yard or beach and make a picture. For inspiration, look online for "marine debris art." Email photos of your work to susan.bryan.ctr@usmc.mil . Random drawings for participant prizes will be held after COVID-19 social distancing is lifted.

Mālama i ka 'āina—care for and live in harmony with the land. Earth Day every day at MCBH.