

# What are the top 4 debris items in San Mateo County?

Last year 3,802 volunteers helped collect over 41,000 pounds of trash all over San Mateo County at the 2008 Coastal Cleanup Day. What did they find, and how much of it?

## #1: Cigarettes/ Cigarette Filters

Total Count:



Over **74,000** cigarette butts were collected at the last three Coastal Cleanup Days in San Mateo County. Though simply tossing a cigarette butt on the ground nearby may seem harmless, these toxic pieces of litter eventually make their way to our creeks and oceans and are deadly to marine life. Cigarette filters are not biodegradable; they are composed of plastic that can persist in the environment for a long period of time.



What can you do?

Be **AWARE** that cigarette butts are litter too! Think before you **toss** and remind your family and friends to **dispose** their cigarettes in a trash can or cigarette receptacle—that's where they belong, not in our oceans!

## #2: Food Wrappers/ Containers



In today's society, we are always on the go and sometimes we lose sight of the effects of a fast-paced lifestyle. Tossing your food wrappers and packaging out your window or on the sidewalk may seem like a quick disposal solution, but doing so has a long lasting impact on our environment. The packaging of your food can be mistaken as food for another, such as birds and fish.

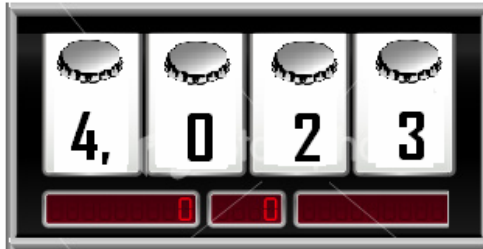


What can you do?

**Reduce** the waste you, as a consumer, produce and be aware of where your wrappers may end up, as you are purchasing your food. The initial sources of this litter are the areas around food businesses. As consumers we can: 1. request that these restaurants and businesses take responsibility for providing their customers with a means to dispose their wrappers properly, and 2. encourage them to use alternative and more sustainable food packaging methods.

## #3: Caps/Lids

Total Count:



Imagine walking along the beach collecting plastic bottle caps and lids that wash up on the shore instead of seashells. You could collect a whole bucket full of these colorful caps! Plastic is one of the major **contaminants** to our world's oceans. Birds and other marine creatures can choke on the caps or ingest them, resulting in a stomach full of plastic, which can lead to malnutrition and often death.



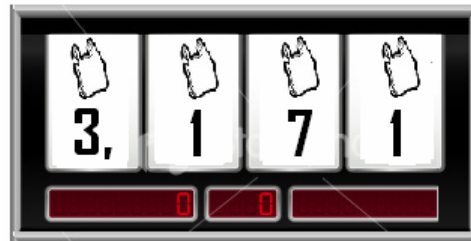
What can you do?

One way to **reduce** the amount of plastic caps and lids is to use reusable water and beverage bottles. Fill up your bottle with a drink to take to work or school, instead of purchasing a bottle. That way, we can work towards seeing a rainbow of colorful life in our oceans, instead of a rainbow of plastic.

## #4: Plastic Bags



Total Count:



Every year, around 500 billion plastic bags are used worldwide\*. Because plastic bags take **hundreds** of years to break down, every year our seas become the “home” to more and more bags. Plastic bags break down into tiny toxic particles that contaminate the soil and waterways and enter the food chain when animals accidentally ingest them.



What can you do?

It’s very easy to get caught up in the habit of using plastic bags for our every little purpose, and it’s all too easy to discard them without realizing the large effect. Begin today to limit, and eventually stop, your consumption of plastic bags. Bring your own reusable bag when you shop and if you have old plastic bags, reuse them!

\*[www.plasticsresource.com](http://www.plasticsresource.com)



SAN MATEO COUNTYWIDE  
**Water Pollution Prevention Program**  
Clean Water. Healthy Community.

These 4 items collected in San Mateo County represent a snapshot of marine debris around the world. Though there are many ways by which trash builds up and reaches our oceans, there is only one source of all of this debris - humans. It is up to us to find solutions to this problem through research, removal, and prevention of marine debris.

If you are interested in participating in this year's Coastal Cleanup Day, please visit [www.flowstobay.org](http://www.flowstobay.org)