

2024 Beach Cleanup Annual Report

# Clean Beaches Clear Solutions

**Surfrider's Mission to Stop Plastic Pollution at Its Source**



© Morgan Maassen





# Introduction

The Surfrider Foundation's Plastic Pollution Initiative aims to protect our ocean from the harms caused by plastic pollution by advocating for the reduction of single-use plastics. This includes eliminating single-use plastics at the source, switching to more sustainable or reusable options, and ensuring that all remaining plastic is mechanically recycled rather than being burned or ending up in landfills and our environment.

The initiative tackles the problem of plastic pollution through both programmatic and policy efforts. The policy arm focuses on [campaigns](#), which have led to hundreds of [successful plastic pollution reduction laws](#) across the United States. Surfrider's programs include: 1) Ocean Friendly Restaurants and Hotels, which recognize and support direct action to decrease the use of single-use plastics in the hospitality industry; and 2) the Better Beach Alliance Beach Cleanup program, which provides hard data critical to supporting our policy initiatives that reduce the amount of plastic ending up in our ocean.

For decades, network-led beach cleanups have been an integral part of the Surfrider Foundation's programs. They're an important way to engage new volunteers and enable them to learn in a hands-on manner about the issues affecting our ocean and coasts — often inspiring volunteers to become grassroots activists in their local chapters who work towards making positive, pragmatic changes within their communities.

Last year's data shows that we're making even bigger impacts than ever before. In 2024, Surfrider recorded the largest amount of trash ever picked up during cleanups, totalling over 365,000 pounds of trash. That is 65,000 pounds more than our previous record! Not only did Surfrider chapters haul off an enormous amount of trash, they also logged the most number of individual trash items ever, with 870,000 itemized pieces of trash recorded into our national cleanup database, most of it being plastic. This is helping to give us an incredibly clear picture of what exactly is polluting our beaches and coasts, which we can use to fight for stronger plastic reduction legislation. As Surfrider's incredible network of coastal advocates continues to grow, we are seeing bigger impacts and more impressive results in protecting our ocean.

The 2024 Beach Cleanup Report not only highlights Surfrider's cleanup efforts but also demonstrates how plastic pollution impacts various coastal regions and reveals the items most often collected. The report also explores the excess of hard-to-avoid plastic packaging and the need for widespread adoption of Extended Producer Responsibility policies to hold polluters accountable for the lifecycle of the products they're creating.

For more information on our beach cleanup data, visit Surfrider's [beach cleanup database](#).

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## 2024 Program Highlights



**365,218**  
Pounds Of Trash Collected



**39,350**  
Volunteers Engaged



**1,268**  
Total Cleanups



# National Overview





# Program Results

Together, 39,350 volunteers removed over 365,000 pounds of trash and recycling from the environment across 1,268 cleanups to ultimately reduce the amount of plastic pollution flowing into our ocean. In 2024, another record-breaking year for Surfrider, we logged the most trash picked up in a single year, beating our previous record by over 65,000 pounds. We also captured the most itemized data points ever, reporting a whopping 870,233 individual items collected.

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**365,218**

Pounds Of Trash Collected



**1,268**

Total Cleanups



**870,233**

Total Items Collected



**39,350**

Volunteers Engaged



**8,777**

Volunteer Hours

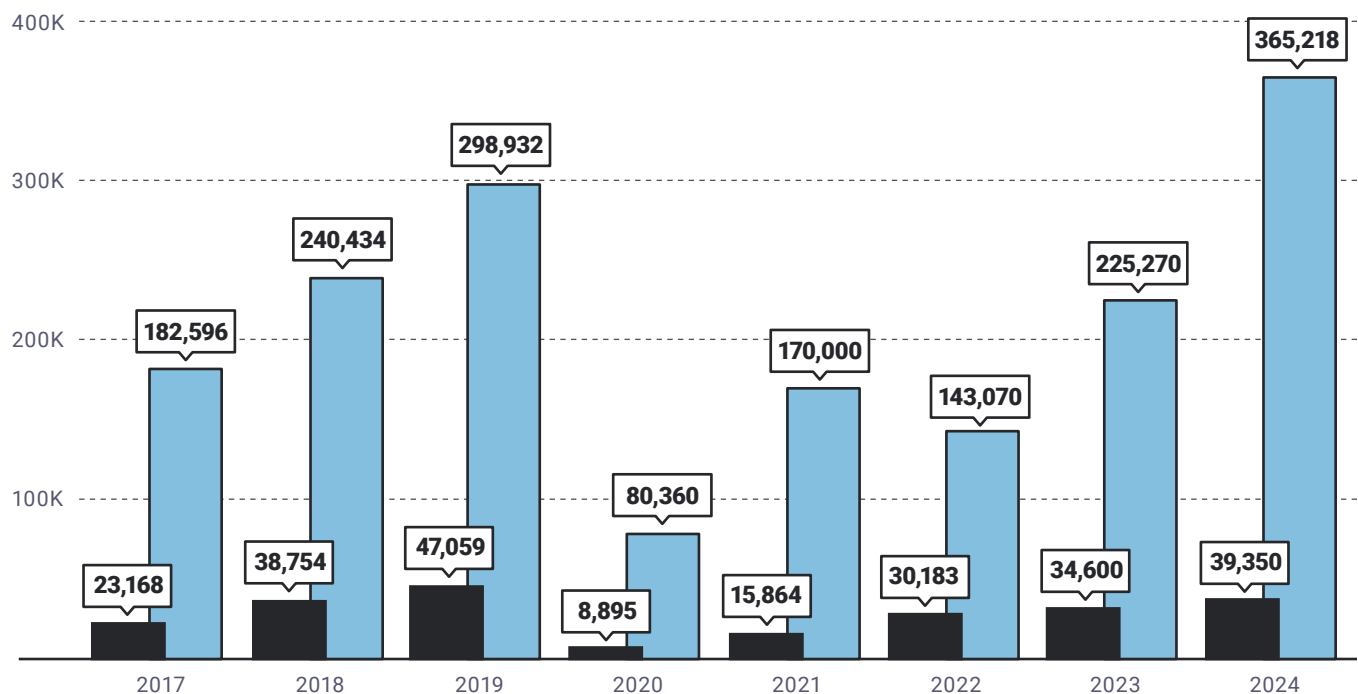


**1,155**

Miles of Beach Cleaned

## Beach Cleanup Program Growth

● Volunteers ● Pounds of Trash Collected





# Plastic Pollution is a Big Problem

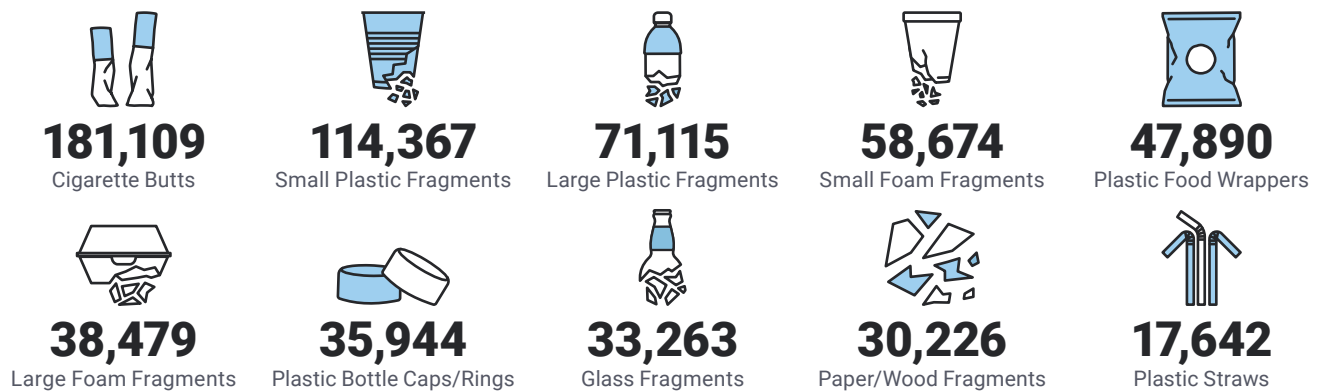
Surfrider's beach cleanup data is clear — plastic pollution is a serious issue plaguing our coasts. Of all items collected and recorded during beach cleanups in 2024, 83% were plastic. Each year, around **11 million metric tons** of plastic enter the ocean and while our beach cleanup efforts strive to reduce this number, they can only do so much.

Not only does our beach cleanup data continue to prove that plastic is the most commonly found material on our beaches, it also shows how plastic behaves once it reaches the environment. Plastic breaks down into smaller and smaller pieces, becoming increasingly difficult to clean up and a bigger threat to the health of coastal ecosystems. About 19.9% of all items collected were plastic fragments smaller than a dime, and 12.6% were plastic fragments larger than a dime. This means that out of the 870,233 items found during beach cleanups, one-third (32.5%) were plastic fragments.

These fragments can infiltrate coastal food systems and harm wildlife. Plastic fragments not only threaten the health and well-being of coastal ecosystems, they can also pose a danger to human health. Microplastics and plastic fragments bioaccumulate up the food chain — becoming more toxic the higher up the food chain you go. So even if you don't see anything wrong with a filet of fresh fish or sushi roll on your dinner plate, your favorite seafood has an increasing chance of being contaminated by plastics and associated chemical pollutants once they've been ingested by marine life.

Surfrider's beach cleanup data confirms that once again, year after year, plastic pollution is everywhere, and we cannot rely on beach cleanups alone to get us out of this mess. We need legislative interventions and industry innovations to rapidly shift away from single-use plastic products to protect the health of our ocean, marine life, and ourselves.

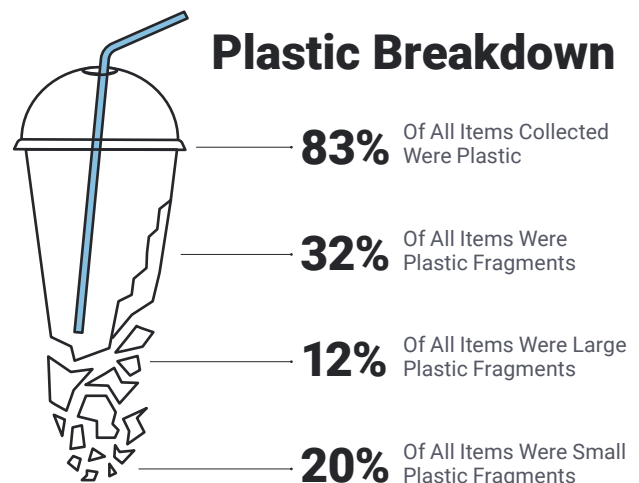
## Top Ten Items Collected



## Broad Usage Categories



## Plastic Breakdown





# Beaches with the Heaviest Hauls

Surfrider chapters and student clubs remove hundreds of thousands of pounds of trash from our beaches and coasts each year. The average weight of trash collected per cleanup is around 186 pounds. However, many of Surfrider's beach cleanups yield much higher weights due to the immense amounts of trash on our coasts. Whether it's a few pieces

of large, heavy debris or a cumulation of smaller pieces of plastic, the staggering amount of trash that Surfrider has removed shows that volunteers are bearing the burden of cleanup efforts. We are calling on local governments and municipalities to find collaborative solutions to these pollution problems because we can't beach clean our way out of this.

## Top ten beaches with the highest weight removed during a single cleanup event:

**65,343 lbs**

Ocean Shores,  
WA – 07/05

**6,000 lbs**

Ormond Beach,  
CA – 09/21

**3,715 lbs**

Kitchens, Kaua'i,  
HI – 10/30

**3,600 lbs**

Mahaulepu, Kaua'i,  
HI – 11/25

**3,220 lbs**

Damariscove Island, Bar  
Cove Beach, ME – 06/08

**3,153 lbs**

Twin Harbors State Park,  
WA – 07/05

**2,931 lbs**

Little Damariscove,  
Damariscove Island,  
ME – 06/08

**2,523 lbs**

Little Drisko Island,  
ME – 08/24

**2,331 lbs**

Adam's St, Adopt a  
Channel Site, CA – 05/25

**2,190 lbs**

Anahola Net Cove, Kaua'i,  
HI – 12/18

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# The Better Beach Alliance

Since 2016, REEF has been the presenting sponsor of Surfrider's national Beach Cleanup Program through the Better Beach Alliance. This alliance encourages all groups — individuals, organizations, and companies — to participate in our shared goal of ending plastic pollution.

To innovate on solutions for this ambitious yet achievable vision, we introduced a new engagement tool to the Better Beach Alliance with Surfrider's annual **Found Objects Art Contest**. This grassroots, user-generated content campaign leads with a positive message to inspire and ultimately build an engaged community dedicated to reducing plastic pollution. With REEF's amplification, we tripled the number of engaged participants as compared to previous years.

The Found Objects contest invites people to share artistic pieces composed of items that they've cleaned up from their local waterways and beaches. Participants share

photos of their Found Objects artwork and a story about their process to inspire each other, and for a chance to win prizes from REEF, Firewire Surfboards, and GoPro. Building off the global impact of the Better Beach Alliance, which has removed two million pounds of trash and plastic from our beaches, this contest is a way to raise awareness about the threats of single-use plastic pollution by tapping into our grassroots network's creativity and ingenuity.

"Found Objects was such a beautiful, visceral way to communicate our common values and capture the imagination of the world," says Shea Perkins, Senior Marketing Manager at REEF. "Supporting Surfrider is REEF's way of supporting stewardship of our coastal communities and ocean planet. REEF is proud to continually evolve our relationship with the Surfrider Foundation, which has been integral in our striving to improve who we are and how we act as a brand."

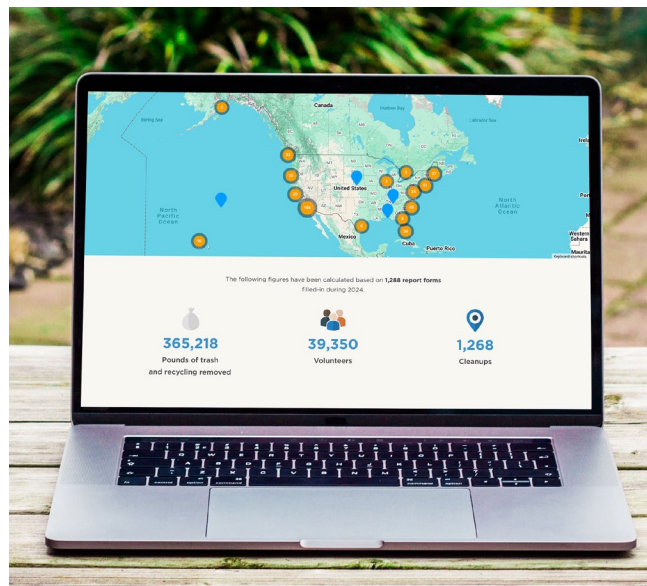


# Database Updates

Surfrider's beach cleanup database, created in 2019, elevates the Beach Cleanup program by allowing easy data reporting across our national network of chapters and student clubs. It helps to amplify the work of Surfrider staff and volunteers by providing an accessible platform to showcase our collective impacts. The database serves as an excellent visual aid for understanding the geographic reach of Surfrider cleanups and easily identifying commonly found items.

As Surfrider's cleanup efforts continue to grow, we adapt the dataset to fit the needs of our network and support future legislation by expanding the dataset to include additional items. By surveying Surfrider chapters and clubs, we are able to identify new items and work to consolidate any less common data points.

**New Items:** In 2024, five new items were added to Surfrider's dataset, and four were consolidated to better reflect commonly found items during cleanups. The addition of mini toiletry bottles, bandaids, fabric/textiles, hagfish traps, and oyster spacers will allow Surfrider chapters to more accurately categorize and report what is being collected during cleanups. This helps to identify where we might need to refocus our efforts and is reflected in evolving policy solutions as well as program updates, such as our newly launched Ocean Friendly Hotels program.



**Consolidated Items:** Single-use surgical masks, single-use masks with filters, and cloth masks were consolidated into the category of single-use masks. Reusable gloves were also removed. These items were originally listed under the category of 'COVID-19 Priority Items' and were incredibly useful during the height of the pandemic. While the distinction allowed us to differentiate the types of masks and gloves found between 2020 and 2023 to show an increased reliance on single-use products and the impact that human behavior can quickly have on our environment, these separate data points were no longer being found often enough to make a significant impact, and the distinction became less relevant.

The ongoing evolution of Surfrider's beach cleanup database is crucial as our cleanup efforts continue to expand. We are incredibly grateful and excited that we can support our growing network of beach cleanup activists who work tirelessly to record their findings and educate their communities about the prevalence of plastic pollution on our beaches, coasts, and inland waterways.

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# Dirtyest Beach Day

Americans love to celebrate holidays, so it is no surprise that the Fourth of July is one of the busiest beach days of the year. People flock to beaches, lakes, and rivers — anywhere they can gather with friends and family to enjoy the outdoors and celebrate the United States. But with all the extra foot traffic and the big festivities comes lots of extra trash. In fact, Surfrider has cleaned up so much trash over the years that we have officially deemed July 5th as the Dirtyest Beach Day of the Year.

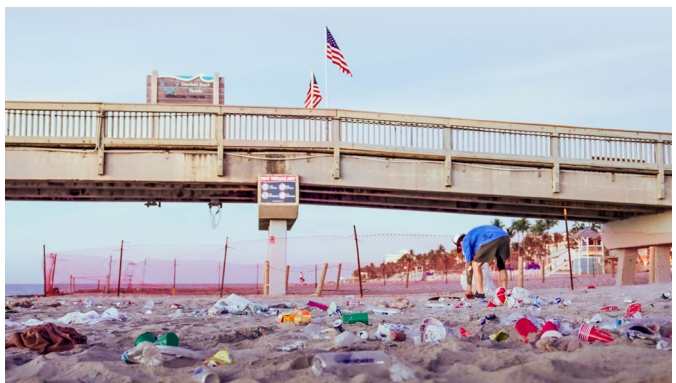
Over the last few years, Surfrider has worked to grow our cleanup efforts on July 5th and bring awareness to the increase in plastic pollution associated with the holiday celebrations. Not only are we working to clean up our favorite places, but we're trying to prevent holiday litter by educating the public and encouraging people to make more sustainable choices. From encouraging a 'pack it in, pack it out' mentality, to choosing reusables over single-use plastics, to educating people about firework trash,

Surfrider knows that we can still have fun celebrating the Fourth of July without trashing our beaches and waterways.

In 2024, Surfrider chapters across the country removed over 70,000 pounds of trash across 50 cleanup events for the Dirtyest Beach Day. Two Surfrider chapters in Washington, the Grays Harbor and Olympia Chapters, worked collaboratively with Coastsavers and other local partners to remove over 65,000 pounds of trash from a single stretch of coastline.

We are incredibly grateful for all of the Surfrider chapters and partners who worked diligently to clean the mess left behind on beaches across the country after the Fourth of July. Surfrider remains committed to protecting our favorite places and hopes that through education and advocacy, we can all enjoy our celebrations in a sustainable and single-use plastic-free way.

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# Regional Highlights



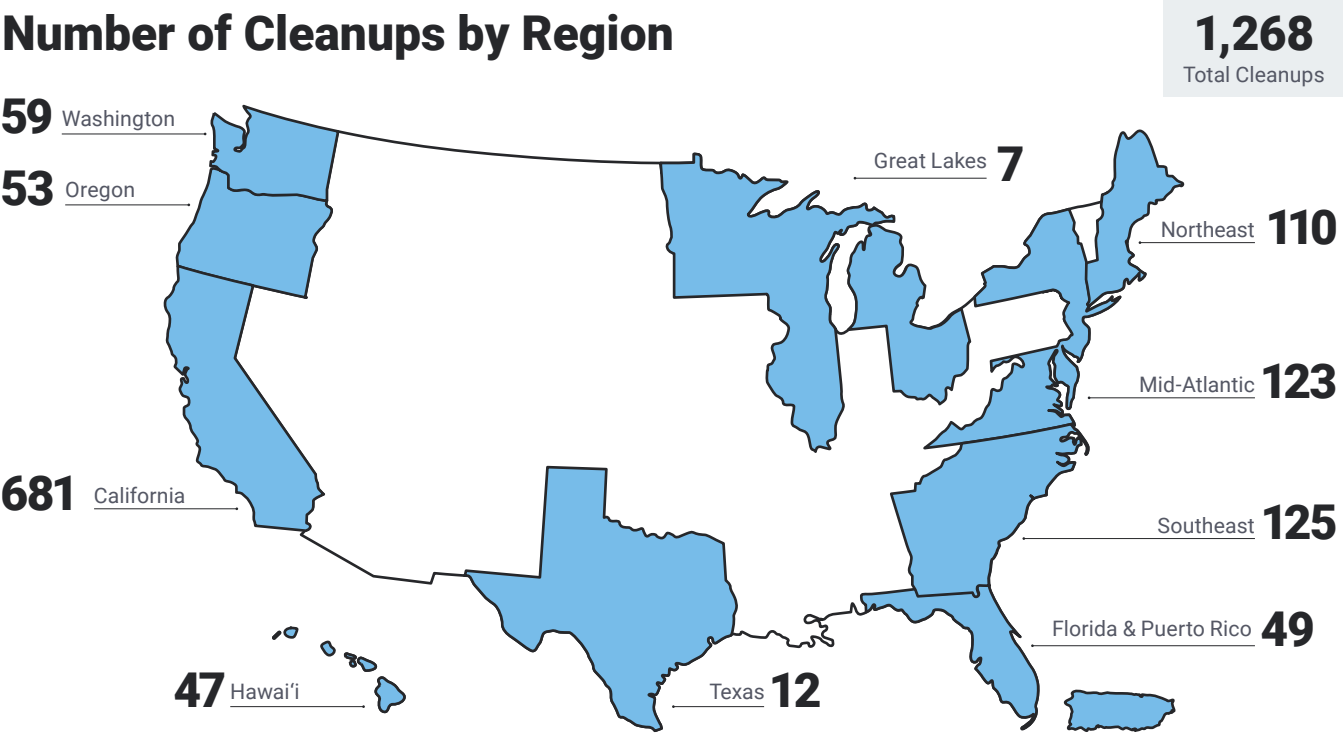


# Regional Impacts

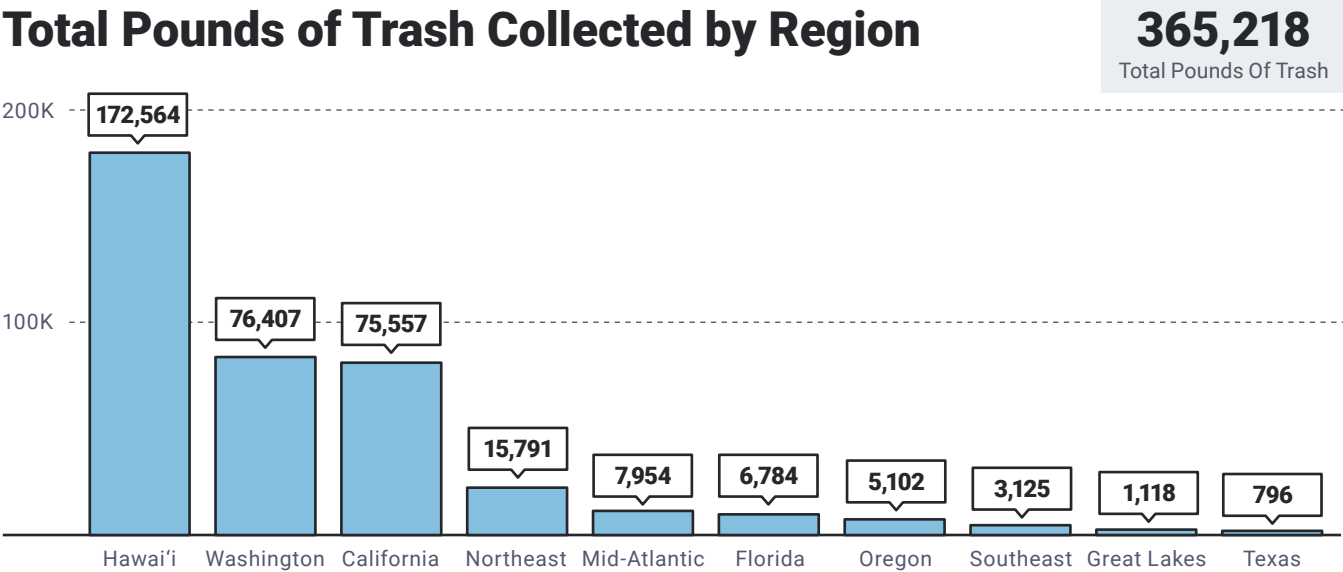
The Surfrider Foundation’s grassroots network of chapters and student clubs serves as the first response to local threats in our coastal communities. With more than 200 chapters and student clubs nationwide, Surfrider volunteers work within their communities to create and lead meaningful change. We caught up with regional Surfrider leaders to learn more about the impacts of their work in 2024.

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## Number of Cleanups by Region



## Total Pounds of Trash Collected by Region



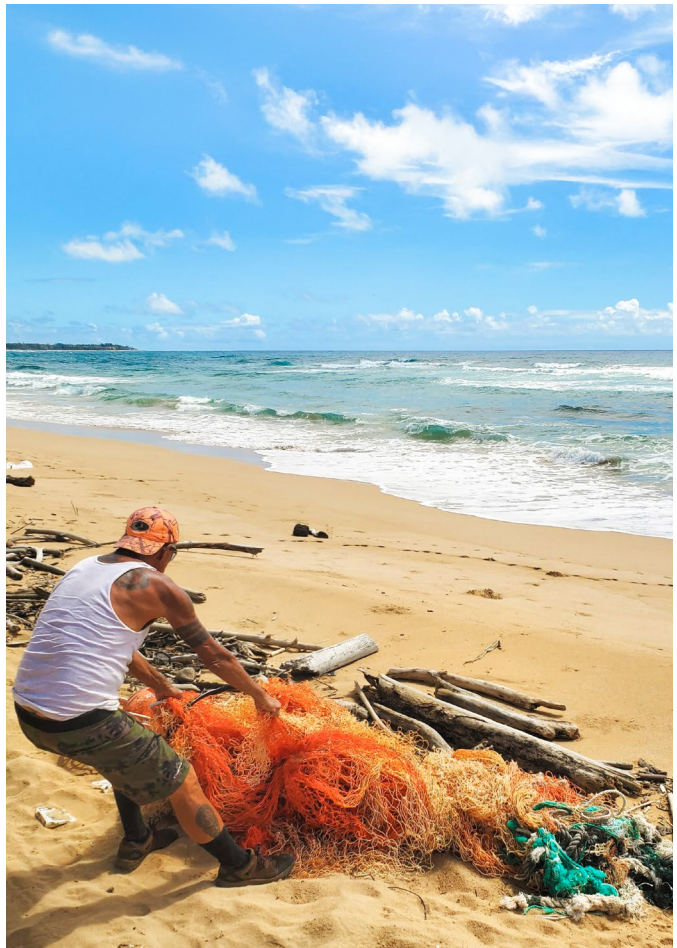
# Hawai'i

**Kaua'i:** In partnership with Hawai'i Wildlife Fund and Hawai'i Pacific University's Center for Marine Debris Research, Surfrider Kaua'i volunteers removed more than 162,902 pounds (81 tons) of marine debris and trash from Kaua'i's beaches and rocky coastlines — beating the previously held record of 120,000 pounds in 2017. Of the amount collected last year, the overwhelming majority (154,157 pounds) was marine debris: fishing nets, lines, eel traps, and other pollution that kill marine life and destroy reefs. According to the International Whaling Commission, 300,000 marine mammals — including whales, dolphins, seals, and sea lions — die annually due to entanglements with ghost fishing gear. When turtles and fish are added, the number of deaths is close to one million.

One of the reasons so much debris lands on Kaua'i's beaches and coastline is that ocean currents have pushed the Pacific Garbage Patch closer to the islands. The waste was collected from the ocean by weekly Net Patrols (287 cleanup events in 2024), Ghost Net Hotline Response, Community and Hui Cleanups, Keiki Field Trip Cleanups, and solo cleanups by local residents as well as visitors, who learn about cleanups through social media or Surfrider Kaua'i's Ocean Friendly Visitors program hotel partners. By year's end, Surfrider Kaua'i tallied a whopping 5,615 volunteers (including 444 local keiki) and 6,424 volunteer hours.

— Hanna Lilley, Surfrider Hawai'i Regional Manager

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# California

**North Orange County:** The North Orange County Chapter has taken its marine debris prevention work inland by adopting a section of the Santa Ana River, located just 3.5 miles upstream from the ocean. This strategic move highlights the chapter's commitment to addressing pollution before it can reach and harm coastal ecosystems. As the largest watershed in Southern California, the Santa Ana River drains over 2,600 square miles of land across four counties, collecting urban runoff, plastic waste, and other debris along the way. By focusing efforts upstream, the chapter is working to intercept pollution where it's most concentrated and prevent it from flowing into our ocean.

In August 2024, the chapter teamed up with the World Surf League and its One Ocean initiative to host a large-scale river cleanup that brought together surfers, students, environmental activists, and residents. Volunteers collected nearly one thousand pounds of trash in a single event, contributing to the total of 25,000 lbs removed since the river was adopted in 2021. The event served as both a hands-on stewardship opportunity and a powerful educational moment, reinforcing that protecting our ocean starts far beyond the shoreline.

— John Wadsworth, Surfrider North Orange County

**Volunteers collected nearly one thousand pounds of trash in a single event, contributing to the total of 25,000 lbs removed since the river was adopted in 2021.**



Top/Bottom Right: WSL / Tommy Pierucki



# Pacific Northwest

**Oregon:** Following the Fourth of July festivities, the Newport Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, supported by the NOAA Marine Debris Program and local partners, organized 13 beach cleanups on July 5th and 7th. A dedicated group of 275 volunteers collected 912 pounds of trash from Oregon's coastlines and riverbanks. Despite existing fireworks regulations, a significant amount of debris was found, emphasizing the need for continued education and enforcement to protect our environment.

In addition to the cleanups, Surfrider Newport placed five 55-gallon waste barrels at beach access points from Lincoln City to Yachats between July 1st and 8th, collecting an additional 640 pounds of trash. Notably, the barrel at Yachats Ocean Road beach access gathered the most waste, highlighting the importance of ongoing efforts in high-traffic areas. These initiatives are part of the Freedom from Marine Debris project, which employs a comprehensive approach — including educational outreach and collaboration with fireworks vendors — to prevent and address marine debris in Lincoln County.

— Jennie Warmack, Surfrider Newport & Lincoln County  
Marine Debris Coordinator

**Washington:** Every July 5th, Washington's coastline tells the same story — one of celebration turned to chaos. Towns like Ocean Shores, which balloon from quiet communities into bustling hubs of over 120,000 beachgoers for the Fourth of July, are left reeling. Fireworks light up more than the sky — they leave scorched debris, dumpster fires, and mounds of trash in their wake. But while the mess is monumental, so is the response. At sunrise, city staff, volunteers, and Surfrider activists step up and onto the sand with gloves, grit, and a shared purpose: to restore our beach back to the clean, safe shoreline we all deserve.

This year, chapter volunteers didn't just react to the mess — we reached out ahead of time, distributing trash bags and raising awareness in the hopes of changing habits before the damage was done. And while the cleanup is always a heavy lift, it's clear that more people are starting to understand the impact of their footprint. These moments are why we do what we do. Surfrider is here to protect what we love, and through community, education, and action, we're turning the tide on pollution — one beach, one volunteer, one July 5th at a time.

— Liz Schotman, Surfrider Washington Regional Manager

**Following the Fourth of July festivities, a dedicated group of 275 volunteers collected 912 pounds of trash from Oregon's coastlines and riverbanks.**



© Kelly Jones





# Great Lakes

**Chicago:** The Chicago Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation has integrated a procedure into its cleanups to better measure plastic pollution on beaches, particularly nurdles and plastic fragment pieces. Based on a procedure developed by the Center for Marine Conservation in the 1980s, the process involves creating one-meter squares along the high tide line at 10-meter intervals, collecting and counting plastic within each square, for a total of 100 meters. This approach allows for estimating the amount of plastic pollution on a beach without having to pick up every single pellet or small piece of plastic. By averaging the counts from multiple samples, the chapter is able to estimate the total amount of plastic pieces and pellets for the entire beach.

Surfrider Chicago also hosts a collaborative cleanup with the Whiting Robertsdale Boat Club. This cleanup is consistently one of the largest in terms of turnout and garbage collected due to Whiting's location at the bottom of Lake Michigan, where debris from the entire lake accumulates. The cleanup's success is attributed to the collaboration between surfers and fishermen from the boat club, who have embraced Surfrider as partners in improving water quality. It's a multigenerational event that includes boaters, fishers, surfers, high school students, veterans, and even members of the city council, which contributes to the event's effectiveness. The event has fostered a sense of community and environmental stewardship, with volunteers like a Vietnam veteran providing food for participants free of charge. This collaborative cleanup engages beach-goers in keeping the area clean, regardless of their respective activities, and fosters a shared sense of responsibility for maintaining the health of Lake Michigan's ecosystems.

**This collaborative cleanup engages beach-goers in keeping the area clean, regardless of their respective activities, and fosters a shared sense of responsibility for maintaining the health of Lake Michigan's ecosystems.**

**Ohio:** Surfrider Northern Ohio hosted five beach cleanups along the shores of Lake Erie in 2024. Over one hundred volunteers collected 452 pounds of trash (7,856 individual pieces) to protect our great lake. Our beach cleanups have become memorable events that promote environmental stewardship, build community, and make a measurable difference in preservation efforts. Cigarette butts and plastic and foam fragments continue to dominate as the items most often recovered. Cigarette butts are the most commonly littered item in the world. They are non-biodegradable and contain harmful chemicals that contribute to the contamination of the environment. It's a serious problem, and we picked up 1,257 of them in 2024.

Our chapter was also one of the Community Partners at the annual Canalway Partners RiverSweep event. RiverSweep started in 1989 and focuses on protecting the Cuyahoga River and surrounding green spaces by cleaning up illegally dumped garbage and litter from streets, greenways, and waterways in and around Cleveland. In 2024, 1,350 volunteers helped collect 24 tons of trash and 491 tires! New and expanded parks, trails, and greenways have been created over the years from RiverSweep sites along the Cuyahoga River Corridor.



# Northeast

**Maine:** Surfrider Foundation's Maine Chapter — which protects over 3,000 miles of coastline — devised an innovative way to give volunteers an opportunity to contribute to the stewardship of their coastline. Launched in 2024, the Beach Guardians Program was developed for volunteers to become the guardians of their local beach or coastal area and learn how to collect and submit data, while cultivating a network of core volunteers to grow chapter impact.

The purpose of the Beach Guardians Program is to supplement the work currently happening through Surfrider's Beach Cleanups, Climate Action Program, and Blue Water Task Force. It allows volunteers to collect data without needing to attend chapter meetings, which is beneficial for chapters that cover a wide geographic area — providing motivated volunteers an opportunity to be recognized for their contributions to the chapter, by giving them a title and operational blueprint.

The Beach Guardian Program has proven to be a successful way to engage new volunteers, and increase the chapter's total number of beach cleanups and correlating data collection. Since launching, the chapter has trained over 35 new Beach Guardians, with many joining other chapter's meetings and events. Their overall cleanup impact has grown tremendously: in 2023, the Maine Chapter collected around 1,000 pounds of trash, whereas in 2024, they collected over 12,000 pounds. The chapter received an innovation award for this program at the 40th Anniversary Summit, and has also earned media recognition from local news outlets.



**Their overall cleanup impact has grown tremendously: in 2023, the Maine Chapter collected around 1,000 pounds of trash, whereas in 2024, they collected over 12,000 pounds.**

**New Hampshire:** We are proud to say that we in New Hampshire are an “all conditions” organization and run beach cleanups in all weather short of a hurricane or blizzard. This year we endured hammering rain, snow, freezing cold, blustery wind, and heat like the face of the sun. But we endured and removed all kinds of trash and found interesting items such as a Barbie, a message in a bottle, a set of car keys, and other interesting items, of which some were kept and added to our mascots.

In October we ran our 5th annual costume-themed beach cleanup, The Halloween Hang Ten. We had a band, Jonny Earthquake cranking surfy tunes, food from our OFR friend Common Roots Collective, and plenty of caffeine from our good friends at NOBL beverages. We had more than 50 attendees of which half were costumed up.

As we like to say, there are no bad days, only bad gear — so there are no excuses when it comes to helping the beach. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, the New Hampshire seacoast was 5,376 items cleaner in 2024!





# Mid-Atlantic

**Delaware:** There's a special cleanup in the Mid-Atlantic region that combines three different chapters from three different states. Volunteers from the Delaware, Ocean City, and Washington, D.C., chapters teamed up for their 4th Annual State Line Beach Cleanup.

The three groups met up at Delaware Seashore State Park and collectively removed 105.5 lbs of trash and marine debris from Keybox Road. They also had support from the Patagonia store in Alexandria, VA, and Anacostia Riverkeeper from Washington, D.C. This event happens to fall on International Surfing Day, so when the forecast

is right, the cleanup volunteers will get in the water and celebrate all their hard work with some fun in the waves. This is a great example of how cleanups can be both fun and effective, especially when we come together to collaborate and celebrate!

**The three groups met up at Delaware Seashore State Park and collectively removed 105.5 lbs of trash and marine debris from Keybox Road.**





# Southeast

**Cape Fear:** In 2024, the Cape Fear Chapter launched the Clean Waves Tour. This tour aimed to engage community members across the Cape Fear area by having different cleanup locations along the coast throughout the year. From Topsail Beach down to Kure Beach, the chapter led 17 cleanups — engaging 313 volunteers and collecting over 630 lbs of trash. What also contributed to the success of this tour was that if a volunteer attended eight out of the 17 cleanups, they would be eligible to win a customized

Surfrider Cape Fear Clean Waves Tour hoodie. This incentive drove folks to not only come out to their local beach but to explore and protect other beaches along the North Carolina coast, with 12 people completing the eight-cleanup criteria. Surfrider Cape Fear is building on this momentum and continuing the Clean Waves Tour in 2025 to keep their beaches healthy and waves clean!

— Kayla Huff, Surfrider Southeast Regional Manager

**From Topsail Beach down to Kure Beach, the chapter led 17 cleanups — engaging 313 volunteers and collecting over 630 lbs of trash.**





# Florida

**Broward:** From sunrise to sunset, volunteers gathered on Deerfield Beach for the first-ever Dawn Till Dusk: Microplastic Clean-a-Thon, hosted by Surfrider Broward in collaboration with a local high school Surfrider student club in honor of Earth Month. At first glance, the beach appeared pristine — but closer inspection revealed a troubling reality: microplastics were scattered throughout the sand, nearly indistinguishable from broken bits of shell. The volunteers asked themselves: *if people struggled to tell the difference, how could sea turtles, seabirds, or fish?* That question became the driving force behind this 12-hour effort, spanning three major beach zones and supported by a coalition of local sponsors and passionate community members.

This was no ordinary cleanup. Volunteers of all ages sifted, filtered, and focused specifically on microplastics — the tiny, often-overlooked pollutants that pose a serious threat to marine life. Corporate teams sponsored two-hour time slots and brought employees to participate, while neighbors, students, and families joined during the open Community Hour. What started as a routine beach cleanup became a transformative experience. The event demonstrated the power of grassroots action and community collaboration, marking a major milestone in local efforts to build awareness of and to address microplastic pollution — proving that collective action can leave an impact that stretches far beyond the tide line.

**The event demonstrated the power of grassroots action and community collaboration, marking a major milestone in local efforts to build awareness of and to address microplastic pollution.**



Top Right/Bottom: Alex Markow



# Puerto Rico

The recent conservation event held at the beautiful Crashboat Beach in Aguadilla Bay was a great success. The day combined a traditional beach cleanup with underwater trash removal and mangrove planting, officially kicking off the start of the planting season. Thanks to the efforts of a passionate group of volunteers, over 250 pounds of waste were removed from both the beach and the ocean floor.

Crashboat is not only one of Puerto Rico's most iconic beaches but also one of the best spots for scuba diving lessons, thanks to its sandy bottom and the artificial reefs that enrich its ecosystem. The area boasts impressive marine biodiversity, making it essential to protect and keep its waters clean.

During the underwater cleanup, supported by local dive company Aquatica, 15 divers worked together to extract debris from the seafloor. One of the most engaging and educational

parts of the day was when the collected trash was placed in special tanks to safely release marine life that had become entangled or made their homes in the debris — such as crabs, starfish, fish, and crustaceans — giving participants a first-hand understanding of the impact of ocean pollution.

Events like this not only help restore our ecosystems but also inspire environmental awareness and community action. A big thank you to everyone who participated and proved that together, we can make a difference!

— Héctor Varela-Vélez, Surfrider Puerto Rico,  
Community Organizer

\*Disclaimer: While Surfrider Foundation does not host underwater cleanups or dive events due to insurance exclusions and liability limitations, our chapters are permitted to collaborate with dive organizations that carry their own insurance, permits, and appropriate dive certifications. These collaborations allow for impactful ocean cleanups and debris data collection alongside our land-based efforts, as seen in this event.

**Thanks to the efforts of a passionate group of volunteers, over 250 pounds of waste were removed from both the beach and the ocean floor.**



© All Images: Shotwell Productions



# Texas

**Galveston:** On July 5th, we got after it on this lovely barrier island in the Gulf that we call home! The Galveston Chapter and Ball High School Club joined forces with some of our favorite partners to battle the heat, pick up the mess from the night before, and be rewarded with cold drinks and good vibes afterward. Because of the amazing partnership with several local groups and 50 volunteers, together we were able to pick up 450 lbs

of litter from the shores of Galveston Island, covering several high-traffic areas from the night before. Special thanks to our co-hosts at the Turtle Island Restoration Network, and the collaborative work with Galveston Park Board, Artist Boat, Moody Gardens, and Galveston Island Brewing.

— Sarah Burgess, Chair, Surfrider Galveston

**Because of the amazing partnership with several local groups and 50 volunteers, together we were able to pick up 450 lbs of litter from the shores of Galveston Island.**





# Student Clubs

**Vocational High School: Isabela, Puerto Rico:** To kick off their first independently organized event, the DHD Surfrider club hosted a beach cleanup at Pastillo Beach in January of 2024. Before the cleanup, multiple students presented to the crowd of volunteers to highlight various cultural and ecological points of interest, such as the “La Cara del Indio” sculpture, sea turtles, and the native harlequin butterfly.

To elevate the impact of this cleanup, other local Surfrider student clubs and their local Surfrider chapter were invited to attend the event. This beach cleanup reflected a collaborative grassroots effort within Surfrider’s powerful network to both clean the beach and educate volunteers about its significance.

— Dr. Heriberto Domenech, Vocational High School:  
Isabela, Puerto Rico

**University of California, Davis:** Being one of Surfrider’s most inland clubs in California, UC Davis continues to elevate our cleanup program through creative inland cleanups happening around their local creek, river, and arboretum. A notable partnership includes their ongoing involvement with the Putah Creek Council, wherein they have collaborated on a series of cleanups and restoration projects throughout 2024. At one of the Putah Creek cleanups in September 2024, over 400 lbs of trash were collected, which included many single-use plastic items. Cleaning the creek also helped lay the groundwork for future riparian restoration projects.

**At one of the Putah Creek cleanups in September 2024, over 400 lbs of trash were collected, which included many single-use plastic items.**





**Ball High School, Texas:** In the 2024-2025 school year, the Surfrider Ball High School Club focused on growing its program and volunteering in more events, as well as hosting activities in the school to improve knowledge about our local environment and its needs. In the fall of 2024, we kicked off our school year with a craft activity to support the 'The Ocean Needs More Friends' campaign. Using secondhand and repurposed craft beads, we made friendship bracelets to remind us to be better friends with the ocean. We also made seed balls using native wildflowers and learned about gardening techniques to reseed neglected spaces around town and promote water retention in soil and improve biodiversity. We made club shirts using thrifted tees and a stencil made by a local artist, Gabriel Prusmack.

Various after-school beach clean-ups took place, and one larger community clean-up was held in February after Mardi Gras. 229 pounds of trash were removed by 29 community

members and Ball High students from Seawall Boulevard and adjacent properties near the Galveston Fishing Pier. Our last meeting involved painting trash barrels, purchased by Surfrider Galveston, as part of a competition hosted by Artist Boat. These trash barrels will be placed out on the beach for beachgoers to use.

— Kaitlin Buhler, Ball High School Club Sponsor

**Christopher Newport University, Virginia:** As a brand new Surfrider student club, the Christopher Newport University students dove right into action through a series of five beach cleanups throughout 2024. Each event attracted a wide range of students, which helped to grow the club's presence on campus and recruit new volunteers. Some cleanups were held in celebration of environmental holidays such as World Water Day & Earth Day. Common items found included plastic water bottles, plastic bags, and single-use food packaging.

**229 pounds of trash were removed by 29 community members and Ball High students from Seawall Boulevard and adjacent properties near the Galveston Fishing Pier.**





# Science and Policy





# Extended Producer Responsibility: Holding Polluters Accountable

Surfrider is fighting against plastic pollution on multiple fronts. From beach cleanups to passing single-use product bans and comprehensive foodware policies, educating consumers and partnering with industry-leading businesses, we are hard at work to reduce our consumer culture's dependency on single-use plastics and to stop plastic pollution at its source. While we're making significant strides, there is another large source of plastic pollution that can be more challenging to address — plastic packaging.

Packaging is the third largest group of trash found during Surfrider's beach cleanups, making up over 16% of all items collected in 2024, and this doesn't even include plastic film or wrappers whose origin is unknown. Avoiding plastic

packaging is incredibly difficult for consumers — just think about your average trip to the grocery store and how much plastic film, bags, cartons, or wrappers you see in every aisle. Not only is plastic packaging pervasive, but most of it is **not recyclable** and ends up in landfills or is incinerated. Even if recycling may be technically possible, most of the time it is **not economically feasible** for most municipal recycling facilities. The excesses of plastic packaging leave our beach cleanup volunteers, consumers, taxpayers, and local governments bearing the burden for products that we cannot recycle but cannot easily avoid. Fortunately, Surfrider is looking to turn the tables and hold the producers responsible for the lifecycle of the products they're creating.

**Packaging is the third largest group of trash found during Surfrider's beach cleanups, making up over 16% of all items collected in 2024.**



Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, is the idea that manufacturers and brands are held responsible for the cost of recycling, waste disposal, and cleanup of their packaging, thereby removing the burden from the public and municipal governments. EPR for packaging works by requiring producers to pay into a fund designated to cover the costs of recycling, disposal, and cleanup of their products. The more wasteful the packaging, the more expensive it is for producers, and vice versa.

The concept of EPR is not new — there are already over **140 EPR laws** in the United States covering an array of hazardous or hard-to-dispose products, including electronics, paint, mattresses, batteries, and more. The laws for these types of products have become the norm, and producers of these products have adjusted accordingly. Now, it's time for plastic packaging producers to follow suit.

There are currently six states — California, Colorado, Oregon, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington — that have passed EPR bills for plastic packaging, with more states working towards EPR victories each year. Surfrider activists campaigned strongly for years in **Maine** and **Washington** to see their bills pass the finish line, battling industry opposition, blocking bad EPR bills, and ensuring their

bills remained strong and focused on real solutions that included source reduction, refill, and reuse. Currently, the New Jersey and New York chapters are working diligently to pass their own statewide EPR for packaging bills. While the different statewide bills may vary slightly, they are all good examples of EPR in action and demonstrate that the broader public is supportive of holding producers accountable for the lifecycle of their products.

Plastic packaging remains a big issue and requires more than a simple ban to properly address. As things stand, taxpayers and local governments are footing the bill for plastic packaging pollution — covering the costs of disposal, recycling, and cleanup. Last year alone, Surfrider volunteers removed nearly 145,000 individual pieces of product packaging\* from our beaches and coastlines. It is time to hold producers accountable through EPR for packaging and shift this burden back on the producers of these products. As we continue to work towards a single-use plastic-free future, EPR is proving to be a powerful policy tool in achieving that vision.

\*Items included are six-pack rings, individually packaged for sale food containers and plastic food wrappers or films, juice boxes, cans, bottles, et al. This count does not include takeout containers or other associated to-go foodware items such as straws, plastic cutlery, etc.

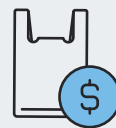
## How Extended Producer Responsibility Works



Producers are held responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, especially post-consumer waste.



Often implemented through producer fees paid into a fund that supports waste management systems.



The more wasteful the packaging, the higher the fee the producer pays.



Producers can reduce fees by designing more sustainable packaging that uses less materials.



Reduces waste and pollution by encouraging less packaging and more recyclable materials.



Local governments benefit by no longer having to cover the cost of managing low-value plastics.



# Conclusion

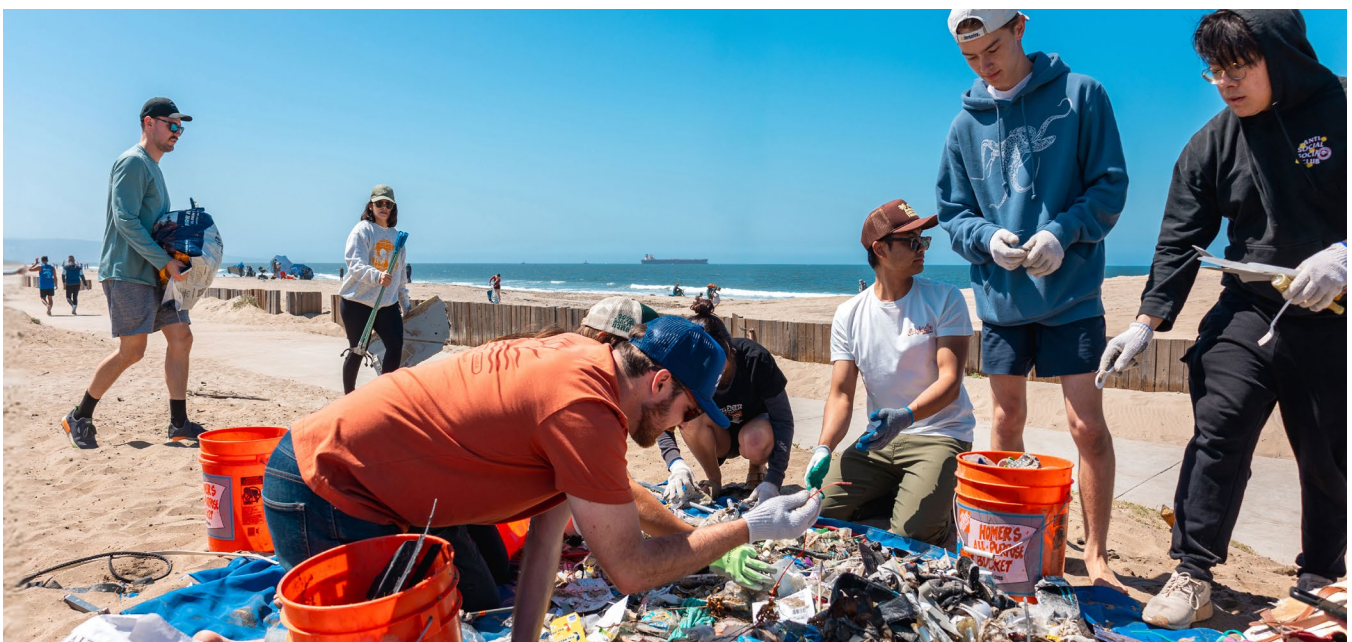
Plastic pollution is a global issue, and Surfrider's Beach Cleanup program is one foundational way that we are working to address it. Over the last decade, Surfrider has proven itself as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to fighting plastic pollution. From engaging thousands of volunteers who collect hundreds of thousands of pounds of trash from our nation's coasts to passing strong legislation that reduces single-use plastic pollution, our work in 2024 shows the true strength and potential of what can happen when we work together as One Surfrider.

Surfrider's record-breaking results in 2024 demonstrate that even though plastic pollution remains a serious looming threat, as awareness about this issue grows, so does the public commitment to protecting our coasts and ocean from plastic pollution. Together, nearly 40,000 volunteers removed over 365,000 pounds of trash and recycling from the environment across 1,268 cleanups. Our activists recorded 870,000 individual trash items into Surfrider's beach cleanup database — over 80% of which were plastic.

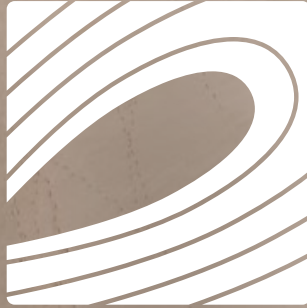
Unfortunately, the rates of plastic pollution are only accelerating, and our volunteers shouldn't have to bear the burden of cleaning up tons of trash that corporations create. It's time to hold polluters accountable. Surfrider is fighting back with policy solutions that tackle the problem at its source. We're pushing for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation that forces manufacturers to pay for the cleanup costs of their own products. We're also advancing plastic reduction laws like Skip the Stuff, strengthening plastic bag bans, and passing balloon release prohibitions across the country. The goal is simple: make the companies creating the mess responsible for cleaning it up, while reducing single-use plastic production altogether. Our volunteers will keep cleaning beaches, but the real solution lies in stopping plastic pollution before it starts.

Thank you to all of our supporters of the Beach Cleanup program, including our Better Beach Alliance partners, The Surf Industry Members Association, chapter leaders, and especially all of the volunteers who have participated in our beach cleanups. Together, we will keep fighting to achieve a single-use plastic-free future.

**Together, nearly 40,000 volunteers removed over 365,000 pounds of trash and recycling from the environment across 1,268 cleanups.**







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