Marine Debris Disposal Options

Marine debris is a wide-ranging problem that requires many solutions to address, such as prevention, research, and removal. Conducting shoreline, near-shore, and other in-water removal efforts is necessary for reducing the immediate threats and harm caused by marine debris. However, once marine debris is removed from the environment, many have issues with identifying options for disposing of it in their area. This document runs through a few disposal options to consider following marine debris removal activities.

Federal Resources

The following resources from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are also available to help you define your specific alternative disposal options.

- Waste Reduction Model (WARM)
- Hazardous Waste Programs
- Recycling Information
- Landfills Information
- Types of Composting
- Disaster Debris Recovery Tool

What Is Your Best Option for Marine Debris Disposal?

The best marine debris disposal method will vary and depend on the location, availability, and resources of the specific removal effort. In some cases, the most environmentally friendly option for disposing of marine debris and natural debris encountered during removal efforts may include recycling, reuse, waste-to-energy, landfill, or other innovative disposal methods. Use these questions and the table on page 2 of this fact sheet to explore the marine debris disposal option(s) that are best for you:

- Can the debris be reused or refurbished?
- Can the debris be locally recycled?
- Are alternatives for energy production available?
- Does disposing of the debris in a local landfill reduce the potential for other types of waste or contamination?

Find Your Region

The NOAA Marine Debris Program has Regional Coordinators positioned around the country. You can contact your Regional Coordinator to discuss alternatives to traditional landfill disposal. Find your region at our website: **https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/your-region**

Understand Your Options for Disposal

Disposal Options

Examples

Reuse and Repurpose

Reusing is the act of finding a new use for recovered marine debris. Similarly, repurposing is adapting an item for use in a different purpose. Get the most mileage out of the materials you encounter.

Debris from cleanups can be repurposed to make art pieces. Old fishing buoys can be used as yard decorations.

Recycle

Recycling is the process of collecting and processing materials that would otherwise end up in landfills or be incinerated, and turning them into new products.

Municipal recycling programs, plastic bottle and aluminum can buy-back or deposit programs.

Landfill

Landfill is a place to dispose of refuse and other waste material by burying it and covering it with soil. They can be the best available disposal option when the other alternatives represent a higher carbon footprint or create the potential for other types of waste or contamination.

Municipal solid waste.

Waste to Energy

Waste to Energy is the conversion of waste materials into usable heat, electricity, or fuel through a variety of processes, including combustion, gasification, pyrolization, anaerobic digestion, and landfill gas recovery.

Mass burn facilities, modular systems, and refuse derived fuel systems.

Compost

Compost is a microbial process that converts plant or organic materials to a more usable organic soil amendment or mulch. This method may be appropriate for paper marine debris (e.g., cardboard, paper plates, etc.) or natural debris that is encountered during removal efforts.

Onsite, vermicompost, aerated (turned) windrow, aerated static pile, and in-vessel.