Marine Debris

Garbage in Our Oceans Can Kill
In a "disposable" society that desires easy, over packaged, and one-use items, it is little wonder that we continue to have a problem with litter. When trash is discarded in an irresponsible manner, it can cause tremendous harm to the environment, especially marine ecosystems. Literally billions of pounds of trash are dumped into the worlds oceans every year either from direct ocean dumping or more commonly from street litter being washed out into the ocean. Here in Miami-Dade County alone, tens of thousands of pounds of garbage is collected each year during shoreline cleanups. Most of that trash emanated, not from boaters (although they contribute quite a bit) but from street litter.

Even animals as smart as dolphins cannot always escape floating garbage like this monofilament netting.

Of all the types of litter in our Bay and ocean, the most troublesome are plastics. Plastics, revered for their longevity and strength, are especially deadly in a marine environment for the same reasons. The fluid motion of a plastic bag undulating in the surf mimics the natural motion of a jellyfish; the food for sea turtles and whales. Animals that ingest plastic garbage often cannot pass it through their system and die of starvation or suffocation. Plastic ties and straps become wrapped around body parts. On young animals, this can lead to an agonizing death; strapping begins to cut into flesh as the animal grows in size. Sores develop and infection can set in.
The solution is simple: Take care of your trash at all times, whether out on the water or at home.

Here are some great ways that you can help:

- Try to buy products that use less packaging and are produced in non-plastics or recyclable plastic (has a 1, 2, or 3 on the container).

- When boating, bring along a container for garbage. Preferably something heavy enough that it won’t blow away. Bring your garbage back to port for disposal.

- If you encounter trash on the water, retrieve it and toss it in your garbage receptacle.

- Participate in beach cleanups like Baynanza! Biscayne Bay Cleanup Day in April, and the International Coastal Cleanup in September.
Sea birds and other marine animals also get snared by discarded fishing line. Monofilament line can stay in the environment a very long time. Snagged fishing hooks and balls of knotted line that are cut “loose” and discarded injure countless numbers of birds and fish.
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