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British beaches are the final resting places for mountains of litter with more arriving on every wave and gust of wind

Marine Conservation Society says beach litter is increasing and behaviour needs to change

What do half a TV, a French bullet-proof vest and an unopened pack of bacon have in common?

They were all cleared from our beaches during a single weekend last September and were among the 223,405 bits of litter that volunteers bagged up and removed as part of the Beachwatch Big Weekend 2013, organised by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS).

The UK's leading beach cleanup and survey has now been running for twenty years and over the two decades the amount of litter found on our beaches has been steadily increasing. The 20th anniversary clean up, which took place between 20th and 23rd September 2013, saw **2,309** items of litter found on every kilometre cleaned – the highest in Beachwatch history.

MCS says that in 20 years **59,493** volunteers have taken part in Beachwatch Big Weekend, removing **5,528,399** pieces of litter from **3,080.5km** of coastline.

“This is a disgusting tide of litter which is threatening the safety of beach visitors both human and animal. It's coming in from the sea, being blown from the land or simply being dumped and dropped. After 20 years of campaigning it's disheartening that in 2013 we are seeing worse litter levels than ever,” says Lauren Eyles, MCS Beachwatch Officer. MCS Beachwatch volunteers record where the litter they find comes from to help the charity campaign to stop it getting there in the first place.

Here's where the litter recorded last September came from:

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Public – 39.4% This is all the stuff littered by people – we drop it intentionally, leave it behind accidentally, or it arrives on the beach carried on the wind or in rivers.

Fishing – 12.6% Includes commercial and recreational fishing stuff – line, nets, weights, floats.

Shipping – 4.5% This is all the stuff that gets dropped, lost or thrown overboard from small craft to massive cargo ships.

Sewage Related Debris (SRD) - 4.3% The really nasty stuff – bits we put down the loo but shouldn't – cotton bud sticks, tampons, nappies and the like.

Fly-tipped 0.9% People use some beaches like the local tip – fly-tipping things like furniture, pottery and ceramics.

Medical – 0.2% Inhalers, plasters, syringes – stuff you really don't want your kids picking up.

Non-sourced - 38.1% All the bits and bobs that we can't really identify and so don't know where it comes from – generally small things or damaged stuff.

Lauren Eyles says 2013 was a vintage year for finding strange things on beaches: "As well as half a TV, a French bullet-proof vest and a pack of bacon, there was a brass candlestick, some plastic bird feet, a birdcage, a bath plug, half a canoe and a set of dentures!"

Top of the finds was once again plastic pieces. These are tiny bits of plastic that have broken off larger items or have been in the sea for possibly decades and become smaller and smaller.

"Plastic is a real issue for our oceans and beaches," says Lauren Eyles. "This year we also picked up lots of lids and caps. However, despite it being a really warm summer, we saw less crisp, sweets and lolly wrappers and fewer plastic bottles. There's continued good news though for Sewage Related Debris (SRD) – there's still less of it about after we asked people, in 2011, to stop flushing things down the loo that should go in the bin."

Regionally, beaches in the North West of England had almost double the amount of litter per kilometre than the national average at over 4,000 pieces, whilst the South West, which normally has high litter levels, had well below the national average at just over 1,750 pieces per kilometre. Litter on Welsh beaches increased by 60% between 2012 and 2013 with almost 4,500 bits of rubbish per kilometre.

MCS says urgent steps must be taken to reverse the rising tide of beach litter. During June it will be launching its Marine Litter Action Network which will be tasked with changing behaviour in a variety of areas from the plastics industry to manufacturing, retail to shipping.

"Marine Litter Action Network meetings and workshops will take place between June 2014 and June 2015. Experts from the areas that we believe can do more will be joining us to identify ways that everyone can help reduce marine litter. This is no talking shop – we will have a year to make a difference and will be presenting the Government with our

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plans which we will be asking them to implement as part of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive which gives the Government certain objectives it has to meet,” says Lauren Eyles.

MCS will be running beach cleans and surveys around the UK coast this Spring and Autumn, and the charity is calling on the public to take part and make this the biggest year of beach cleans and surveys ever. The first big event will take place at hundreds of beaches between 24th and 30th April. You can find out more and register at www.mcsuk.org/foreverfish

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Broadcasters – MCS has an ISDN facility

Editors Notes:

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of our seas, shores and wildlife. MCS campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment.

MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the annual Good Beach Guide (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk), the Good Fish Guide and www.fishonline.org relating to sustainable seafood, as well as promoting public participation in volunteer projects such as MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend (www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch) and Basking Shark Watch www.mcsuk.org.

MCS Beachwatch is our coastal environmental initiative, supporting local individuals, groups and communities in caring for their local shoreline. MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend is our annual flagship event, now in its 21st year, and it occurs on the third weekend of every September. It represents the UK's input to the global International Coastal Cleanup (representing 152 countries and locations), which occurs over the same weekend in September, providing a world-wide snapshot of marine litter.

Data collected by thousands of volunteers from hundreds of beaches around the UK is published by MCS the following spring in the Beachwatch Summary Report. This document is used at regional, national and international levels to raise awareness of the impacts of marine litter, to promote measures to reduce litter at source and to campaign

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for marine litter legislation. The 20th Beachwatch litter survey and beach clean took place on the 20th to 23rd September 2013

Beachwatch 2014 will take place on 19th – 22nd September

UK Wide Overview

For the purposes of the Beachwatch Big Weekend data analysis the UK is divided into England (including the Isle of Man), Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

Northern Ireland had the highest litter density. However, despite a decrease in number of beaches surveyed, volunteers that took part and distance covered, litter density in Northern Ireland decreased from 8,224 items/km in 2012 to 7,028 items/km in 2013, representing a decrease of over 14%.

Wales had the second highest litter levels in 2013 and represents over 61% increase from 2012 (2,726 items/kilometre in 2012 compared to 4402.5 in 2013).

England had the third highest litter levels (2,295 items/km) representing an increase of 20% compared to figures relating to Beachwatch Big Weekend 2012 (1,909.5 items/km).

Scotland had the fourth highest average litter density level (1,963 items/km in 2013) representing a 3% decrease on the figure for 2012 (2,041 items/km). A switch in position from England in 2012.

The Channel Islands had the lowest litter density (727.7 items/km in 2013) representing a 9% decrease compared to litter density in 2012 (808.3 items/km) when levels decreased by 45% from 2010.

Within England the usual pattern was not observed. The greatest density of litter was recorded - in the North West of 4,128 items/km. This is interesting as in 2012, the North West was the only region to decrease by a staggering 60%. The North East followed (3,262.3/km), South East (2,418.5/km) and South West (1,761.1/km) respectively. This is particularly interesting as the South West, for the last five plus years has had the highest litter density. All regions have increased in levels from 2012, with the exception of the South West where average levels have decreased by over 44%. (1,761.1 items/km in 2013 compared to 3,162.8 items/km in 2012)

When compared to MCS Beachwatch Big Weekend 2012 average litter densities decreased in all countries with the exception of Wales and England.