

Talking Trash

by Ann Thomas

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Spurred by a new and stringent directive from the State Water Resources Control Board, Marin County communities are joining together to combat litter: the food containers, cigarette butts, plastic pellets, and other discarded waste which can wash into waterways, even be ingested by fish and other aquatic species. A countywide Clean Marin effort is being organized to comply with new state requirements that communities must reduce the amount of trash entering creeks and storm drains, and eventually the bay and ocean.

Clean Marin hopes to engage citizen volunteers to help with this effort. Volunteer “Clean” programs are already underway in Mill Valley, San Rafael, and Novato, and other towns. Outreach will begin later this year to residents around the county interested in helping to keep their neighborhoods litter-free.

The countywide cleanup program is supported by the Marin County Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program (MCSTOPPP), a network of county, city, and town representatives who enforce the water board directives. Clean Marin and MCSTOPPP hope to bring together anti-litter advocates, and share tools for Clean Marin volunteers. Practices being considered include “Adopt a Spot” and Green Business projects.

The State Water Resources Control Board’s 2015 staff report describing stringent new trash discharge reduction requirements, states that: “The presence of trash in surface waters, especially coastal and marine waters, is a serious issue in California.”

The report goes on: “Trash is a threat to aquatic habitat and life as soon as it enters state waters. Mammals, turtles, birds, fish, and crustaceans are threatened following the ingestion of, or entanglement by, trash. (These) can be fatal for fresh-water, estuarine, and marine life...”

The final water board order, which arrived in June, requires the county, its cities and towns, to undertake one of two trash programs: 1) install devices in all storm drains located in priority land use areas that are capable of capturing particles that are five mm or larger; or 2) install the devices only in higher traffic areas, while also implementing programs that achieve the same benefits as the full-scale use of trash capture devices. Most Marin communities will opt to adopt the second alternative. Municipalities must submit their plans by the end of 2018.

If you’re interested in being involved in Clean Marin efforts, or are already doing cleanups in your neighborhood, contact MCSTOPPP staff at mcstoppp@marincounty.org. Residents of Fairfax or Larkspur also can contact their public works departments at the addresses below.

Fairfax Staff at the Good Earth grocery store do an exceptional job keeping their general vicinity clean, reports town public works manager Mark Lockaby, and he hopes to engage the broader business community in that effort. Anyone interested in volunteering to help is invited to contact Mark Lockaby at MLockaby@townoffairfax.org.

San Anselmo The town recently installed four new fountains with water bottle filling stations to reduce litter from plastic water bottles, and plans to install more waste and recycling cans. In the future, they hope to get the community more involve through education and awareness.



Some litter is thrown into our creeks, but most finds its way there driven by the wind or via storm drains, and sooner or later reaches the bay. Photo by Charles Kennard

Larkspur Scott Metcho will coordinate the Clean Larkspur effort. He would appreciate hearing from anyone who might help. Email him at SMetcho@cityoflarkspur.org and put the words “trash” or “clean Larkspur” in the subject line.

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