

Taking out the Trash



Trash and litter in our waterways can be harmful to our health, the environment, and the economy

When EPA representatives met with 4th graders in Maryland last year to observe their work as "[stream stewards](#)," many of the students had the same comment – there's too much trash in the water.

One young girl told us, "People need to protect our world from getting dirty...because some people throw trash on the ground and they don't pick it up so we need to tell them to recycle so we don't get pollution in the water."

That's the basic idea – although in far more technical terms – behind steps taken by the state of Maryland and the District of Columbia under the Clean Water Act to control trash impacting two major rivers – the Anacostia and the Patapsco.

Trash and debris washed or dumped into our waterways pose more than aesthetic problems. They're a serious health hazard to people, wildlife and fish and can have economic impacts. Trash harms birds and marine life who consume small pieces, mistaking them for food. In fact, a shard of a plastic DVD case was identified as the cause of the [recent death of an endangered sei whale](#) in Virginia's Elizabeth River. Some of the waste contains chemicals and pathogens that affect water quality.

In 2010, the Maryland and District of Columbia environmental agencies combined to develop [strict pollution limits](#), known as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), for trash in the Anacostia River. It was the first – and is still the only – interstate trash TMDL in the country.

And then earlier this month, [EPA approved a TMDL](#) submitted by the Maryland Department of the Environment for parts of the Patapsco River to deal with trash problems in Baltimore area streams and its famous harbor. The department worked closely with the City and County of Baltimore and with environmental stakeholders on the final product.

One of the ways trash is already being removed from Baltimore Harbor is through an innovative water wheel that collects it. Check out this [video and story](#) to see how it works.

And visit [this site](#) for tips on what you can do to keep trash out of waterways.