Trash Free Seas® Program Media Toolkit

Program Overview

Ocean Conservancy has led the fight for a clean, trash-free ocean since 1986, when the organization launched its first annual International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) on a beach in Texas. Since then, the ICC has expanded to over 150 countries and has mobilized millions of volunteers to remove approximately 340 million pounds of trash from beaches and waterways around the globe, all the while logging each item and building the world's largest database on marine debris.

Recognizing that cleanups are only part of the solution, Ocean Conservancy has leveraged that data and invested in additional science to better understand the sources of ocean plastics. In 2011, Ocean Conservancy convened leading researchers in an expert working group to establish a scientific baseline for the sources, fate and impact of plastics in our ocean. The resulting study by Jambeck et al. (2015) published in *Science* estimated, for the first time, the annual amount of plastics entering the ocean from land. In 2012, Ocean Conservancy launched the Trash Free Seas Alliance®, bringing together conservationists, scientists and members of the private sector to work together for pragmatic, impactful solutions to the problem, such as the launch of Circulate Capital – the world's first catalytic capital firm dedicated to keeping plastics out of the ocean, and Urban Ocean, a platform to engage city leaders on the issue. In 2019, Ocean Conservancy assumed leadership of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative to reduce the amount of lost and abandoned fishing gear entering the ocean and engage fishers on best practices. Learn more at oceanconservancy.org/trashfreeseas.

Our Initiatives

MOBILIZING THE PUBLIC

International Coastal Cleanup

The International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) started on a single beach in Texas in 1986, when Ocean Conservancy staff decided to organize a cleanup at a beach near our then-headquarters. At the time, Ocean Conservancy had a different name, and the organization was much smaller. But the goal of the cleanup was the same as it is today: to have an immediate, positive impact on the health of the ocean and the animals and communities that depend on it; and to foster awareness and engage the public in ocean conservation. What makes the ICC so unique is its focus on data. In addition to collecting trash, volunteers log every item using a paper data card or our Webby Award-nominated app Clean Swell, helping us build our Ocean Trash Index – the world's largest marine debris database. Scientists, policymakers, and others rely on the data to inform research and mitigation strategies. Since the first ICC more than 30 years ago, millions of volunteers have removed approximately 340 million pounds of trash from beaches and waterways around the world, reaching more than 150 countries.

Skip the Straw

Plastic straws have long figured among the top ten items collected every year during our International Coastal Cleanup. In fact, volunteers have collected nearly 14 million straws and stirrers from beaches and waterways since the start of the ICC. When straws and other plastic debris make their way into our ocean, they pose a real danger to sea turtles, albatross, fish and other ocean wildlife. What makes plastic straws unique is that for the vast majority of people they are not necessary. What's more, sustainable, ocean-friendly alternatives are available.

That's why Ocean Conservancy created the Skip the Straw pledge in 2014, encouraging people everywhere to Skip the Straw when they are able and to encourage others to do the same. Since then, more than 23,000 supporters have pledged to skip the straw; and the movement has taken on a life of its own, inspiring regulations and voluntary phase-outs by restaurants, companies and communities.

Quit the Cutlery

In 2019, Ocean Conservancy released its 2018 International Coastal Cleanup results, which showed that plastic forks, knives and spoons were among the top 10 items collected by volunteers around the world for the first time. Plastic cutlery was found to be among the most deadly types of marine debris in a 2015 study by Ocean Conservancy scientists and partners. To highlight this new data point, Ocean Conservancy launched a Quit the Cutlery pledge, urging people to forgo single-use plastic cutlery and instead choose reusable options wherever possible.

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Trash Free Seas Alliance®

Launched by Ocean Conservancy in 2012, the Trash Free Seas Alliance® (TFSA) brings together 30+ leaders from industry, conservation and academia to create a forum for pragmatic, real-world collaboration focused on the measurable reduction of ocean trash. The TFSA has published three highly regarded reports that provide critical insights into how and why trash ends up in the ocean, as well as where the most leakage occurs and what can be done to reverse the flow. In its latest work, the Plastics Policy Playbook, the TFSA identified ways to improve the economics of collection across the value chain. These research-based strategies are informing the TFSA's current efforts to implement waste management pilot projects in cities around the globe. Visit the Trash Free Seas Alliance® webpage for more information.

Circulate Capital

In 2017 Ocean Conservancy worked with Closed Loop Partners investment firm and members of the Trash Free Seas Alliance® to launch Circulate Capital. With a focus on South and Southeast Asia, this catalytic investment fund is dedicated to financing companies, projects, and infrastructure that prevent plastics from leaking into the ocean, and de-risking broader investment in the waste management sector. In 2018, Ocean Conservancy, the Trash Free Seas Alliance, and Circulate Capital announced $90 million capitalization of the fund, as well as the creation of The Incubator Network, in partnership with SecondMuse, to support entrepreneurs in the waste management and recycling sector in Southeast Asia. In April 2020, Circulate Capital announced its first two funding projects in Indonesia and India.

LEADING WITH SCIENCE

No organization or institution has done more to drive and elevate the science of ocean plastics than Ocean Conservancy. Since 2010, we have invested in catalytic, policy-relevant research that advances our understanding of ocean plastics and identifies solutions to the problem. In 2020, we are continuing to explore the effects of plastics on animals, ecosystems and seafood with Ocean Conservancy Science Advisor Dr. Chelsea Rochman and her research lab at the University of Toronto. Ocean Conservancy has also undertaken an analysis to better understand the role of the United States and other developed economies in ocean plastic pollution, in collaboration with academic and technical research partners. The findings from this work will further refine our understanding of ocean plastic pollution and the potential policy measures that can prevent plastic waste from becoming pollution in the first place. We are also exploring investments in emerging science around microfibers, lost or abandoned fishing gear, and other areas.

MOVING CONGRESS TO ACT

Ocean Conservancy boasts one of the most active government relations teams of any ocean NGO, and we have made ocean plastics a policy priority for U.S. lawmakers. This includes providing testimony and other resources to members of Congress as well as advocating for legislation on the issue. Ocean Conservancy was an early champion of the Save Our Seas Act, which reauthorized the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program and called on the U.S. State Department to more fully engage in international efforts to address ocean plastics. We provided strong support for the subsequent Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, which proposed badly needed improvements to both domestic and international waste management and recycling systems. In 2020, Ocean Conservancy endorsed the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, which offered a suite of measures to fight ocean plastic pollution, including banning unnecessary single-use plastics, implementing extended producer responsibility, and incentivizing recycling.

SETTING INTERNATIONAL POLICY AGENDAS

APEC

Since 2016, Ocean Conservancy has been working with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) 21 member economies to combat ocean plastic pollution in the Asia-Pacific region. Ocean Conservancy has participated in a number of high-level meetings on the issue, including the APEC High-Level Meeting on Accelerating Waste Management Solutions to Reduce Marine Litter and the APEC Marine Debris Stakeholder Meeting on Improving Data and Coordination and Developing New Partnerships. Ocean Conservancy played a key role in shaping APEC's 2016 "Policy and Practice Recommendations: Overcoming Barriers to Financing Waste Management Systems and Reducing Marine Litter," which drew heavily from Ocean Conservancy's own policy analyses. In May 2019, and coinciding with Chile's APEC host year, Ocean Conservancy and the Government of Chile launched a formal partnership. Altogether, these efforts have contributed to advancing the development and implementation of the Marine Debris Roadmap, which was endorsed at the ministerial level in 2019. Ocean Conservancy is continuing to work with APEC economies on this topic.

Urban Ocean and USAID's Clean Cities, Blue Ocean Initiative

Larger cities are a major source of marine debris, particularly in developing economies where economic growth has outpaced infrastructure development. At the same time, cities generally have a leading role in building and running water, sanitation and waste management systems. In early 2019 Ocean Conservancy, 100 Resilient Cities (now, Resilient Cities Network), Circulate Capital, and the Trash Free Seas Alliance® announced the launch of Urban Ocean, an initiative to engage cities in the fight for clean, healthy seas by improving municipal waste collection

and management systems. Working with leaders from city governments, academia, civil society and the private sector, the platform will develop best practices for embedding the reduction of marine plastic waste into other core city priorities like public health, economic growth and job creation. The partnership has since evolved and is now run by Ocean Conservancy, The Circulate Initiative, and the Resilient Cities Network. In June 2020, these three partners announced the first cohort of cities.

In September 2019, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) announced that Ocean Conservancy is among the lead partners for its new Clean Cities, Blue Ocean (CCBO) program to combat ocean plastic pollution. With an investment of $48 million, CCBO will focus on key countries in Asia and Latin America to build capacity and commitment for the 3Rs — reduce, reuse, and recycle — and improve waste management in areas where the ocean plastic crisis is most acute. The CCBO consortium, led by Tetra Tech, includes Ocean Conservancy, ICMA and The Manoff Group.

Vietnam National Action Plan

In 2019, Vietnam released a National Action Plan on Marine Plastic Waste Management (NAP), which Ocean Conservancy helped shape, and the Prime Minister pledged to eliminate single-use plastics by 2025. The country has committed to tackling the issue as the 2020 Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. Now, Ocean Conservancy is working to accelerate the implementation of Vietnam's NAP by focusing on the policy, financing and science of marine debris reduction. Because much of the marine debris coming from Vietnam flows from its many rivers to the ocean, we are also working with local organizations to develop and deploy river capture devices. The first device was launched in the Song Hong (Red River) in January 2021.

Global Ghost Gear Initiative

The Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI) is the only cross-sectoral alliance dedicated to solving the problem of abandoned, lost, or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) – widely referred to as "ghost gear" – around the world. The GGGI brings together more than 100 stakeholder groups, including 15 national governments as well as representatives from civil society, the private sector, public agencies, academia, intergovernmental organizations, and others from across the fishing industry to tackle ghost gear at a global scale. Since its founding in 2015, the GGGI has worked to implement a wide variety of preventative, mitigative and curative approaches to ghost gear, shaping fisheries management policy and building the evidence base around the prevalence and impact of this threat. In 2017, the GGGI developed the Best Practice Framework for the Management of Fishing Gear, which has been adopted by a range of seafood companies and in national and regional marine litter and fisheries management action plans. The GGGI has made meaningful change on the ground in fishing economies and communities, partnering with local fishers to remove ghost gear in places like the Gulf of Maine, Panama City, Vanuatu and the South Pacific.

Our Experts

Ocean Conservancy's Trash Free Seas team is comprised of nearly two dozen experts drawn from the science, policy, conservation and development fields. Our senior leadership includes:

George Leonard
Chief Scientist

Trained as a marine ecologist, George has 20 years of experience in ocean policy and advocacy, market-based solutions to environmental challenges and marine research. He has been instrumental in leading some of the most cutting-edge and comprehensive research on trash in the marine ecosystem. Before joining Ocean Conservancy, George developed the scientific foundation for the nascent sustainable seafood movement at Monterey Bay Aquarium by working closely with major seafood buyers to improve their seafood procurement practices. He helped launch the Communication Partnership for Science and the Sea (COMPASS), an innovative approach to communicating emerging marine conservation science to policymakers, NGOs and resource managers. George earned a Ph. D. from Brown University in Rhode Island and a M.S. from Moss Landing Marine Laboratories in California. He completed his undergraduate education at Middlebury College in Vermont. A native of New England, George is based in Ocean Conservancy's office in Santa Cruz, California.

Nick Mallos
Senior Director, Trash Free Seas® Program

Nick oversees Ocean Conservancy's work on marine debris which includes the annual International Coastal Cleanup, its international plastics initiative and the Trash Free Seas Alliance® (a co-operative group of businesses, conservationists and scientists focused on reducing plastic inputs into the ocean by 50% by 2025). Since joining ocean conservancy in 2010, he's had the great fortune to participate in once in a lifetime research expeditions and work with incredible, devoted and inspiring people not only at Ocean Conservancy but also in coastal and inland communities around the world. This includes extensive field research assignments that have taken him from the North Pacific Gyre to the remote coastlines of Alaska and the Philippines and the tsunami-stricken shores of Japan. Nick has also testified before the U.S. Senate on the sources and impacts of plastic debris in the ocean, and routinely participates in international policy discussions at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, United Nations Environment Programme and other global forums. He holds a Master's degree from Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University and a Bachelor's degree from Dickinson College in Pennsylvania.

Chever Voltmer
Director, Plastics Initiative

Chever leads Ocean Conservancy's finance and policy work, including the Trash Free Seas Alliance, the Plastics Policy Playbook, our city-level efforts through Urban Ocean and CCBO, and our engagement in Vietnam. Prior to joining Ocean Conservancy, Chever worked at the Office of Ocean and Polar Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, where she was the lead for international marine debris issues, overseeing U.S. engagement on this issue in the United Nations, G7, G20, APEC, ASEAN, and other fora. A retired career member of the Foreign Service, Chever served overseas in Poland, Guyana, Russia, Ecuador, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, and Estonia. In Russia, Chever was the Embassy's macroeconomist while detailed to the Department of Treasury. In Ukraine, she was the Assistance Coordinator for a $120 million annual budget, in addition to being the Economic Counselor. In Estonia, she served as the Deputy Chief of Mission. She also spent a year as the Director for Central America and the Caribbean at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Chever holds undergraduate degrees in economics and Russian studies and holds an M.S. from the National War College, where she was a Distinguished Graduate.

Allison Schutes
Director, International Coastal Cleanup

Allison oversees the annual International Coastal Cleanup, the world's largest, single-day volunteer effort on behalf of the ocean. In this role, she helps to coordinate and mobilize a diverse global network of local charities and environmental advocacy groups who volunteer their time and data on marine debris to Ocean Conservancy. This data feeds into the Ocean Trash Index, an item-by item, location-by-location database of the most persistent forms of trash littering our beaches and ocean. Allison also plays a key role in the management of other stakeholder relationships for the Trash Free Seas® Program. She holds a Bachelor's degree from Rollins College in Florida and a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Florida.

Ingrid Giskes
Director, Global Ghost Gear Initiative

Ingrid Giskes is the Director of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative (GGGI), where she leads the GGGI's policy agenda and portfolio of projects across more than 100 partners including 15 national governments. Through her work, she has spent time with artisanal fishers in Vanuatu and Indonesia to mark and track their fishing gear, led government and corporate roundtables, participated in gear removals and presented at high-level policy and industry conferences including APEC, ASEAN, WCPFC, Our Ocean and the UN Ocean Conference. She supported the Fisheries Technology Team at FAO to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear (VGMFG) and the development of the Responsible Fishing Operations Umbrella Programme. She holds a BSc in Germanic Languages, a MSc in Education and a MSc in International Relations, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution. Previously, she undertook overseas development work in Cambodia, lectured at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou (China), worked for Amnesty International in Australia on refugee policy, and worked for World Animal Protection for 10 years in a variety of roles including as their International Head of the Sea Change Programme overseeing the ocean portfolio of 15 country offices and chairing the Global Ghost Gear Initiative.

Resources

OCEAN CONSERVANCY REPORTS

International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) Reports (Annual)
Every year, Ocean Conservancy publishes a report of the previous year's ICC results. The report includes the total number of volunteers who participated, the total weight of trash collected, and the top ten most commonly collected items, as well as country-level stats and unusual finds around the world.

Threat Rank Report (2015)
Scientists at Ocean Conservancy and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation surveyed experts to assess the ecological threat to seabirds, sea turtles and marine mammals of some of the most commonly collected ICC items. Published in the journal Marine Policy, the paper found fishing gear, balloons, plastic bags and utensils, bottle caps and cigarette butts as the most dangerous.

Stemming the Tide (2015)
In the wake of the publication of the Jambeck, et al paper in Science Advances, Ocean Conservancy and the McKinsey Center for Business and Environment sought to identify effective measures to reduce plastic leakage in the five countries most vulnerable to it (China, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines). The report showed that improving waste collection was an important first step

The Next Wave (2017)
Building on the research presented in Stemming the Tide, this report examined waste management systems in Southeast Asia and found that these systems generally operate at a net cost. The report explored some of the mechanisms available to cover the finance gap and improve collection.

The Role of Gender in Waste Management (2019)
The report explores the role that women have to play in developing effective waste management systems in three countries where ocean plastic leakage is acute: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. It offers a number of interventions to support women in this sector.

Sum of Our Parts (2019)
Ocean Conservancy convened a group of experts to analyze the current landscape of efforts to combat ocean plastic

and discuss how different actors can improve cooperation to increase the efficacy of the movement. They found that three fundamental pieces of architecture -- common narrative, a transparent set of goals and targets, and a way of keeping track of collective wins – must be put in place for the movement to succeed.

Plastics Policy Playbook (2019)
Based on desk-side research, in-country workshops and robust financial modeling, the report is an in-depth guide to some of the most impactful public- and private-sector interventions available to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution, focusing on China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Key findings include that in these five target countries, there is a net financing gap for plastic waste collection of between US $28 – $40 per ton; and extended producer responsibility (often referred to as EPR), minimum recycled content standards, and bans on problematic and unnecessary single-use plastics can have the most impact on closing that gap.

Exploring Solutions to Ocean Plastics: Supporting Southeast Asia's Informal Waste Sector (2020)
Ocean Conservancy commissioned a research team to assess how best to support informal sector waste workers in Vietnam and Indonesia, two of the countries most impacted by plastic pollution. While more research is necessary, the team identified three areas for further exploration.

MARINE DEBRIS: KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- In 2015, scientists used 2010 data to estimate that **8 million metric tons** of plastic flow from land into the ocean every year (SOURCE: Science); that's equivalent to one garbage truck of plastic dumping into the ocean every minute (SOURCE: Ocean Conservancy estimate).

- In its September 2020 issue, *Science* published a paper using 2016 data to estimate that approximately **11 million metric tons of plastic pollution enter the ocean every year**. (SOURCE: Science) In the same journal issue, a second paper used 2016 data to estimate that **19-24 million metric tons of plastics enter the aquatic environment (which includes the ocean, rivers and lakes) each year**. (SOURCE: Science/Ocean Conservancy)

- In October 2020, Ocean Conservancy scientists co-authored a study in *Science Advances* showing that the United States is the number-one generator of plastic world in the world and that, when accounting for its plastic waste exports, it is as high as third among global contributors to plastic pollution in coastal environments. (SOURCE: Science Advances/Ocean Conservancy)

- Plastic has been found in every corner of the ocean, from the deepest trench (SOURCE: CNN) to the most remote Arctic ice (SOURCE: Reuters). Plastics have also entered the atmosphere (SOURCE: NPR).

- More than **800 marine species** are impacted by plastic, from the tiniest zooplankton to the largest whales (SOURCE: UN Report).

- Plastics have entered the human food chain. One study found plastics in 28% of all individual fish sampled at an Indonesian fish market, and in 25% of all individual fish and shellfish sampled at a Californian fish market (SOURCE: Scientific Reports). Plastics have also been found in sea salt (SOURCE: Scientific Reports/Environmental Science and Technology) and drinking water (SOURCE: Frontiers in Chemistry).

- Ocean plastic pollution costs the global economy an estimated **$2.5 trillion annually** (SOURCE: Marine Pollution Bulletin).

- Estimates from 2009 suggest that the amount of ghost gear (abandoned, lost or derelict fishing gear like nets, lines and traps) entering the ocean ranges from 640,000 – 800,000 metric tons annually, but this number is likely to be much higher today. (SOURCE: UN/FAO) More recent studies from 2017 and 2018 suggest that as much as 46-70% of all floating macroplastic in our ocean might be fishing gear when measured by weight. (SOURCE: Nature)

- Volunteers with Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup collect millions of pounds of trash – mostly plastics – from beaches and waterways around the world ever year, in a single day. Until 2019, cigarette butts (which contain plastic filters) were always the most-collected item; that year, as announced in 2020, food wrappers were the number-one item. Other common items include plastic bags, plastic beverage bottles, plastic bottle caps, plastic straws and stirrers, plastic lids, plastic/foam take-out containers, and plastic cutlery. (SOURCE: Ocean Conservancy)

- Every year since 2017, all of the top 10 items found on beaches and waterways during Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup have been single-use plastics. (SOURCE: Ocean Conservancy)

- Fishing gear, plastic bags and utensils, balloons, cigarette butts, and plastic bottle caps are the **top 5 deadliest forms of marine debris** (SOURCE: Ocean Conservancy/Marine Policy).

- While rivers are likely an important transporter of plastics to the ocean, they are not – as often stated – responsible for 90% of all plastics entering the ocean. Rather, a study in

Environmental Science & Technology found that just 10 rivers could be responsible for approximately 10% of all land-based plastics entering the ocean annually. (SOURCE: Environmental Science & Technology)

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