

Serendipity: Cleaning Up Our Act to Reduce Sea of Trash

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From recycling plastic bags to helping rid the beach of garbage, the adage think globally, act locally is true.

Remember when the hardest thing to figure out about trash was whose turn it was to take it out? We Santa Barbarans try to shop with reusable bags, buy items in recyclable packaging, separate our trash and appropriately dispose of electronics, batteries, paints and other harmful discards. So I was perturbed the other day when I read a Los Angeles Times article postulating whether people should pay per can to toss their trash. I'm surprised any municipal government still would encourage unsustainable trash production by charging a set fee for limitless trash.



Karen Telleen-Lawton

At least they're talking about it. Reducing, reusing and recycling have at last become vogue issues. A little Dumpster diving will reveal what's new in trash.

Locally, there's the increasingly popular annual Coastal Cleanup Day, on Sept. 20. The beach beautification is organized by Santa Barbara County (visit www.LessIsMore.org/coast). Last year, more than 550 volunteers scoured 17 local beaches of more than 1,600 pounds of trash and 1,000 pounds of recyclables. This year, sign up to help on your favorite beach. If it's not listed, you can become its captain.

While ridding the beach of unsightly trash is pleasing to our eyes, the biggest beneficiaries are our most vulnerable members: children, marine birds and mammals,

who ingest or are injured or even killed by trash. That's why Californians are working on a way to affect beach garbage before it's deposited. [California Bill 2058](#) encourages us to bring reusable bags to the grocery by requiring purchase of plastic carryout bags for a quarter each.

We use 19 billion carryout plastic bags annually, carrying them their first micro step of a 1,000-year life. Many end up in the ocean. Moreover, plastic bags are made from petroleum and natural gas, contributing to energy dependence and global warming. Even if you're undecided on the paper-vs.-plastic debate, there's no doubt that a reduction in throwaways can only be helpful. Nevertheless, an Aug. 4 vote suspended consideration of Assembly Bill 2058 into the Legislature's recess.

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When Californians fail to reduce plastics or collect the ones we use, the ocean turns them into someone else's problem. Hawaii's Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, designated by President Bush, may be the next stop.

Chris Woolaway, who coordinates the Ocean Conservancy's "Get the Drift and Bag It" international coastal cleanup, says ocean currents bring an estimated 57 tons of garbage and discarded fishing gear annually to the 10 islands and the waters surrounding them. That amounts to more than 70 beach cleanups.

This catastrophic situation was supposed to ameliorate with the monument designation in 2006, but this year the debris cleanup budget was slashed to \$400,000 from \$2.1 million in 2005. There have been piecemeal additions, but the total amount slated for 2009 is little more than 25 percent of the original budget, far less than can keep up with new additions from California and other sources.

Somehow that seems to be a feature of our legislative system: proposing far reaching, once-and-for-all-sounding bills, then letting them languish in committee. Or they are passed and slashed: the funding cut after the spotlight has moved elsewhere. This

situation isn't sustainable for waste reduction or anything else. What is sustainable is the now-old adage to think globally and act locally.

See you at the beach!