

ITN Looks to Next Wave of Marine Debris

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Marine debris isn't a new phenomenon in Alaska. Items have been washing up on shorelines across the state for decades. But when the Japanese Tsunami washed away entire towns in 2011, things changed. North America braced itself for an onslaught of debris.

Government scrambled for clean-up funds, and citizen volunteers, armed with bags and good intentions, took to the beaches. Tsunami remnants are still en route, and as KMXT's Brianna Gibbs reports, the next wave of debris could bring some new obstacles.

Last year the State Department of Environmental Conservation funded an aerial survey over much of Southeast and Southcentral Alaska. It wasn't the first time the coast was photographed, but the images collected during that survey showed something new on Alaska's shorelines.

-- (Marine Debris 1 :03 "Massive quantities of foam.")

Tom

Pogson is the director of marine programs, outreach and education for Island Trails Network in Kodiak. He joined the organization shortly after the Japanese Tsunami. Since then, Pogson has devoted himself to cleaning beaches, especially those covered in foam.

-- (Marine Debris 2 :15 “*Footsteps* You can see here how these little pieces of foam start to get harder and harder to pick up. And then they start becoming part of the beach. There’s an awful lot of it here when you start looking. I mean look at it all, look at all that.”)

Pogson

said it was the arrival of the foam that convinced the state tsunami debris was coming. But it was also just the tip of the iceberg.

-- (Marine Debris 3 :15 “You know the video footage of the tsunami event is powerful because it shows, you know walls of water, 20 and 30 feet high, washing inland and mowing everything in its path down and washing it back out to sea.”)

Entire towns and their contents were washed away.

-- (Marine Debris 4 :06 “Insecticides to paint, paint thinner, industrial chemicals of all kinds, hydraulic fluids.”)

And
if it floats, Pogson said it’s probably heading this way.

That’s
a problem, especially for the brigades of volunteers that will be cleaning up Alaska’s shorelines this summer. As heavier items make their way across the Pacific Ocean, it’s likely that more and more hazardous material will start washing up.

-- (Marine Debris 5 :10 “There’s things that are commonly washing up on beaches that are not in the purview of every person, in terms of their safety.”)

The items that
could start washing up won’t only pose threats to the environment and people around them, but the arrival of hazardous materials will bring with them new removal challenges. Pogson said ITN is working toward those certifications.

-- (Marine Debris 6 :15 “But it’s not something we can’t offer the general public. And it’s a difficult problem. And in the end we will have this training, we will get the funding, we’ll stet the time aside, but at least for this season we’re going try and minimize everyone’s exposure to that by just find it, record it, photograph it, report it. We can find someone who’s qualified, potentially, to get it, but we don’t have the training, we don’t have the funding.”)

said he doesn't want to discourage the good Samaritans across the state, he just wants people to be aware of the type of marine debris showing up.

-- (Marine Debris 7 :22 "To ask people to go out and pick up hazardous materials is not something we can do, nor is it something we're trying to do. We want people to avoid those things. If you don't know what it is and it looks suspect, you can document it, photograph it, tell us where it is. The state DEC is very interested in anything that might be potentially hazardous, and or toxic, so we're recording those and forwarding information to them. But it's not for everyone.")

In
Kodiak, I'm Brianna Gibbs.

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