

EPA's Trash Free Waters Program

Supporting Healthy
Communities and Vibrant
Ecosystems

Our Program

Our mission is to prevent trash from getting into our waterways and remove trash that is already in the environment. We refer to the garbage polluting rivers, lakes, streams, and creeks as “aquatic trash”. If it is not properly disposed of or securely contained, garbage can easily become aquatic trash. In fact, the majority of trash found in our waterways and oceans originates on land.

We improve the health of our nation’s waterways and communities by fostering effective partnerships, providing informational resources, and facilitating shared learning. To prevent and remove aquatic trash, we work with our partners in support of community and place-based projects that address the major sources of aquatic trash, which include intentional litter and escaped trash.

Our Goals

Directly in line with our stated mission, our program goals are:

1. Prevention

Reduce waste generation at the source and change behaviors that cause trash to get into the environment and our waterways.

2. Removal

Remove trash from U.S. waterways by supporting trash capture solutions and other remediation efforts.

3. Research

Improve understanding of the sources, causes, pathways, and impacts of aquatic trash (including microplastics) to aid in the development of effective solutions that reduce trash pollution and minimize its associated environmental and public health risks.

Our Services

As a voluntary partnership program, the Trash Free Waters Program collaborates with communities, academia, state and local governments, tribes, federal agencies, NGOs, trade associations, and businesses to implement projects at the municipal, state, and regional levels.

- Facilitate coordination across relevant EPA offices and the U.S. Government Agencies on trash issues.
- Leverage, strengthen, and build partnerships between government, NGO, and private sector entities.
- Provide funding and technical assistance to partners to support trash reduction, cleanup, and research.
- Assist with research to better understand aquatic trash sources, causes, impacts, and solutions.
- Develop and share educational and technical tools and resources to aid in aquatic trash prevention and mitigation.

Our Achievements

Since 2013, TFW has provided technical and financial support to over 80 place-based projects designed to prevent trash from entering waterways. Most TFW projects fall under the below categories:

Source reduction



Trash capture



Research




Community engagement



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