

# Calendar

## July 5 Filth Beach Cleanup Day

**A**bout three years ago we found a discarded fire department dummy floating," says Linda Isakson, Oceanside's environmental specialist, who is in charge of the city's beach cleanup scheduled for the day after the Fourth of July. "Until we were able to fish it out, our volunteers thought it was a person."

Bill Hickman of the Surfrider Foundation's San Diego chapter, a cosponsor of the event in Oceanside and in five other locations on the same day, was asked if any stuff of value has ever been found on the 20 beach cleanups in which he has participated over the past two

years. Any good eBay items, for example? He laughs, then

replies, "Last spring, during a creek-to-bay cleanup, people found a bundled kilogram of cocaine, which they obviously turned in to the authorities."

Besides the occasional illicit or extraordinary item, Hickman says, "Balloons are something we've been seeing a lot of recently" — along with the usual plastic bottles, soda cans, foil, and fast-food wrappers.

And what is the most common piece of trash found on beach cleanups? "The number-one piece of trash is cigarette butts," he says. "That's not just in number but in the weight and mass of them. It's unbelievable how many are out there. They make up roughly 50 percent of the haul."

The percentage doesn't vary from beach to beach in San Diego, says Hickman. Isakson agrees, citing research naming cigarette butts as the most common type of litter on earth. She provides a chart showing that filters from 5.6 trillion cigarettes (i.e., the approximate annual worldwide production) translates into more than 2.1 billion pounds of butts. The United States's share — from some 470 billion cigarettes — is a total of more than 176 million pounds each year.

How many butts do Isakson's volunteers typically find on one of Oceanside's four or five annual beach cleanups? "After a while, when doing these cleanups, people just stop

counting," she says, "because there are just so many." But about a year and a half ago, in November 2002, she did keep a very accurate count, when volunteers focused on nothing but cigarette butts. "We pulled more than 45,000 of them out of Oceanside's beaches in two hours. Since then, there have been a couple of other times when we've had volunteers concentrate only on cigarette butts, and the numbers of them have dropped dramatically — I remember 20,000 was one count — so what I think has happened is that we have removed a

lot of the old ones."

Although they may look as if they're made of cotton and paper, cigarette filters are actually 95 percent cellulose acetate, which is a plastic slow to degrade. "It takes 5 to 12 years for one cigarette butt to decompose in nature," says Isakson.

The blame for the mess rests only partially with the beachgoing smokers who regularly stub their cigarettes in the sand. "Cigarette butts make their way down to beaches in a number of ways," says Isakson. "We're talking storm drains — every time it rains.

People don't think about that fact when they flick their lighted butt out the window while driving down Highway 78 or 76 or Oceanside Boulevard."

It's disheartening to learn this next bit of information: There's evidence that recent bans on indoor smoking have made the situation worse, since many smokers who used to fill up ashtrays on their desks now toss their butts in the street or parking lot.

Butt trash is both ugly and harmful, says Isakson. "Cigarettes contain an enormous amount of pesticides and chemicals that people are not only putting into their bodies but into the environment."

The Fourth of July is a busy weekend for smokers and nonsmokers in Oceanside. "We estimate 100,000 people downtown each day," says Isakson, "and our beaches really do look pretty disgusting afterwards."

Of the six beaches that the San Diego Surfrider Foundation has selected for cleanups on Monday, Hickman expects Oceanside to have one of the largest turnouts. So does Isakson, who says, "I usually get between 300 to 500 volunteers. For this one, I'm hoping to get about 500 — that's my goal."

Look for the banners and tents at each location. After a quick briefing, volunteers will be provided with medical gloves and trash bags. Hickman doesn't think it's a bad idea to wear other gloves over the medical ones. He also recommends long sleeves, lots of sunscreen, and sandals rather than shoes or sneakers. "They're easier to walk in on the sand."

— Jeanne Schinto



PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVE ALLEN

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**Beach Cleanup Day:**  
**The "Morning After" Mess**  
**Monday, July 5**  
**9:00 a.m. – noon**  
**Oceanside South Jetty**  
**Ocean Beach Pier**  
**Belmont Park at Mission Beach**  
**Pacific Beach Drive**  
**Del Mar River Mouth**  
**Carlsbad State Beach**  
**Info for Oceanside:**  
**760-435-5807**  
**[oceansidecleanwaterprogram.org](http://oceansidecleanwaterprogram.org);**  
**for all other locations:**  
**858-792-9940 or [surfridersd.org](http://surfridersd.org)**