

Info/Background:

Marine debris is the name given to waste that finds its way into our seas and oceans. Plastics, rubber, metal, wood and glass can be found floating in our oceans or washed up on our beaches. Marine debris is not only a hazard to ships, divers and beach goers; it is also a threat to marine life. While 80% of the rubbish found at sea is believed to come from land based sources and should be contained, 20% is presently coming from sea based sources which is harder to control.

Legislation exists to prevent pollution from ships (MARPOL 73/78) which has been adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Under this convention garbage disposal from ships should follow strict criteria (*see table Garbage Disposal from Ships*). This is self-policed and not necessarily always adhered to. Furthermore although the Mediterranean Sea has been designated a Special Area for the purpose of MARPOL 73/78, this provision has not yet entered into force due to the lack of adequate reception facilities for waste disposal.¹

Gibraltar's coastal and marine environment is affected by waste from land based sources and from rubbish dumped at sea, the latter sanctioned under existing legislation! One positive development is that the Convention is under review which will be completed by October 2008. The ESG will be working alongside Clean up Greece and others in a bid to improve the rules at an international level as well as to raise awareness about these problems. It will also continue to highlight our littering problems in Gibraltar.

Did you know?

- Every day, ships throughout the world jettison 5.5 million items of waste into the sea²
- Three times as much rubbish is dumped into the world's oceans annually as the weight of the fish caught³
- Plastic debris causes the death of more than a million seabirds every year, as well as more than 100,000 marine mammals. Syringes, cigarette lighters and toothbrushes have been found inside the stomachs of dead seabirds, which mistake them for food⁴

Also read <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/02/05/6856/>

¹Information taken from Publication produced by CLEAN UP GREECE, HELMEPA and MIO-ECSDE, 2007 "Public awareness for the Management of Marine Litter in the Mediterranean";

² Global marine Litter Information : <http://marine-litter.gpa.unep.org/>;

³ Australian Marine Conservation Society: www.amcs.org.au/;

⁴ UN Environment Programme, 2008 Independent